OSPREY GAMES
ALAN BAHR
CRESCENDO OF VIOLENCE
A NEON-NOIR ROLEPLAYING GAME

ALAN BAHR

CRESCENDO OF VIOLENCE

A NEON-NOIR ROLEPLAYING GAME

ILLUSTRATED BY ANDREW THOMPSON

OSPREY GAMES

OSPREY GAMES

Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Kemp House, Chawley Park, Cumnor Hill, Oxford OX2 9PH, UK

29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

1385 Broadway, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10018, USA

E-mail: info@ospreygames.co.uk

www.ospreygames.co.uk

OSPREY GAMES is a trademark of Osprey Publishing Ltd

First published in Great Britain in 2022

This electronic edition published in 2022 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

© Alan Bahr, 2022

Alan Bahr has asserted his rights under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB 9781472847652; eBook 9781472847669; ePDF 9781472847676; XML 9781472847645

Osprey Games supports the Woodland Trust, the UK's leading woodland conservation charity.

To find out more about our authors and books visit www.ospreypublishing.com. Here you will find extracts, author interviews, details of forthcoming events and the option to sign up for our newsletter.

Illustrations by Andrew Thompson

Dedication: *To my mother, who taught me piano and imbued in me an everlasting appreciation of music. To my dad, who gave me a love of the written word, and made sure our lives were filled with stories, old and new.*

To Chick Corea, who passed during the writing of this game; John Woo, who started me on my path of studying and appreciating international cinema; and all the talented jazz musicians who have made my life richer with their music. I owe them all an incalculable debt, and I hope my love of their work shows.

Special Thanks: *Rob Herbert, whose excellent* Space Bounty Head *helped me codify the idea of using the five-act jazz structure in a game, and Robin Laws, whose* Feng Shui 2 *reinvigorated my love for action movie roleplaying.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD 7

INTRODUCTION 9

What is Neon-Noir? 10
What is Heroic Bloodshed? 11
Blending the Genres 12
Inspiring Media 12
What is a Roleplaying Game? 13
What You Need to Play the Game 17
The Most Important Detail 19

THE WORLD AROUND YOU 21

A Timeline of the World 21
The View from the End of the 21st Century 26
Neo York 28
Neo York in a Snapshot 31
Who Lives in Neo York? 32
Crime 35
Law Enforcement 40
Lifestyle 41
Problems Facing Neo York 45
Megacorporations 46
Outer Space 52
Tips for Portraying Neo York 53

PLAYING THE GAME ... 55

Basic Tests 56
Opposed Tests 58
Bonuses and Penalties 58
Consequences of Failure 59
Aid and Supporting Tests 59
Actions 60
Combat 63
Momentum 66
Reserves 67
Downtime Actions 68
Advancement and Experience 72
Heat 75

STORY STRUCTURE ... 77

Intro – The Set-Up 78
Act I – The Main Plot 79
Act II – The Quiet before the Storm 79
Act III – The Big Finale 80
Outro – The Epilogue 80
Example Session: Sibling Rivalry 81

THE JOB OF THE GAME MASTER 85

General Principles 85
Running a Safe Game 90

CHARACTER CREATION 93

The Goal of a Character 93
The Character Creation Process 95
Origins 96
Professions 99
Talents 106

EQUIPMENT AND GEAR 115

Starting Equipment 115
Equipment Qualities 116
Weapons 117
Armour 119
Other Gear 120
Cybernetics 122
Genemods 126

HACKING AND THE WETNET 129

Hacking 130
Firewalls 130

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS 133

Enemies 134
Contacts and Allies 140

CHARACTER SHEET 142

FOREWORD

It is my belief that the author of every roleplaying game should make an attempt to communicate the goal of their game, what it's about, and work to ensure that the reader has every understanding of intent that can be made available to them.

In many ways, *Crescendo of Violence* is the most ambitious game I've ever designed. That's a good thing, and the process of getting to this final text has really made me improve as a designer. It is a blend of rules-light mechanics, narrative story-first mechanics, and structured rules for high-octane action.

Crescendo of Violence is a toolkit game designed to tell a very specific type of story: a high-action, high-violence, gun-fu noir story set in a cybered-out future. Every rule I've included is designed to hit one of those notes. Anything that didn't, I cut or stripped back. There are no rules for things that I feel aren't applicable to my vision of these themes.

I've tried to get as close to an ideal rule set for that specific game as possible. I'm sure that there'll be imperfections and oversights, but I am very proud, very pleased, and very gratified with the final result for *Crescendo of Violence*.

Where you find gaps in the rule set, I hope the design process is transparent enough that you can fill them in yourself in a way that you find fun, satisfying, and that makes the game a little bit more your own.

This was the hardest game I've ever written, on a lot of levels. Music is magic in many ways. I wish I'd captured what music has meant and will mean to me. This game challenged me when I didn't want to be challenged. It happened during a hard time in the world, my personal life, and my career history. But we carried on through and I love what we made. We made a big swing for the fences with this game and, in the end, I think that's a good thing, and it allowed us to make a truly unique game.

Alan Bahr, 2022

If you were around in the first year or so of my career, you might recall that I released another card, token, and dice-based roleplaying game named *Crescendo of Violence*. This game is a reimagining after a half-decade of experience, learning, and growth as a designer.

You'll find threads and themes that reach between the games (use of tokens of multiple colours/types, narratively focused damage, etc.), though they are wildly different in many respects (setting, mechanics, and more).

DRINK MENU

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Crescendo of Violence*, a jazz- and cinema-inspired roleplaying game that blends heroic bloodshed and neon-noir into an action-packed, high-octane, and improvisational wire- and gun-fu roleplaying experience set in a cybered-up retro-future dystopia.

This is a complete roleplaying game, with setting, rules, and everything else you'll need to play in one book. There are a lot of genres and terms thrown around in this book, so before we dive in, let's clarify some of them.

THIS ISN'T CYBERPUNK

While the visual style of this retro-future dystopia might appear cyberpunk, the game itself is not. While it borrows a number of themes from cyberpunk, such as the concerns around advancing technology, disenfranchisement, power, and corporations, it isn't explicitly about those things or pushing back against them.

Cyberpunk focuses on life at the bottom of the heap in a dystopia where government has failed, corporate power rules all, and crime is rampant. Cyberpunk protagonists, if not actively rebelling against this new order, are usually getting crushed by it, and its stories are as often about ideas as people.

Crescendo of Violence is a game about people. People who have to make hard choices, in hard situations, in a hard world. People who make selfish choices, be it to get a leg up or just get by. People who more interested in fighting their own battles and personal demons than fighting the system (although for some that may be one and the same).

So, while *Crescendo of Violence* shares many aesthetic elements with cyberpunk, and certainly can tell a cyberpunk story if you want it to, that's not how I've explicitly oriented the game.

WHAT IS NEON-NOIR?

Neon-noir is a modern extension of the classic film noir genre that flourished in American cinema around the middle of the 20th century. Both neon-noir and classic noir focus on seedy urban underbellies, telling saxophone-saturated stories of violence, crime, and hard-boiled investigators.

Where neon-noir starts to differentiate itself is in its setting and visual style. In neon-noir stories, protagonists are alone in the vast, neon-lit cityscapes of the modern day or dystopian future. Heroes in neon-noir are often alienated from the world in some way, emotionally and socially isolated even when physically surrounded by hundreds of thousands, or even millions, of people.

Neon-noir draws from the same stable of character tropes as noir, so expect ex-soldiers just trying to get by in civilian life, femme fatales lounging in smoke-filled dive bars, and hard-drinking private investigators fumbling for the emergency whisky in their desks while the flickering light of a dying neon sign casts them simultaneously in harsh light and stark shadow. These aren't people out to change the world, they're much more interested in paying rent come the end of the month, or surviving until next Tuesday in their gritty, broken world.

At its core, neon-noir is a cynical and morally grey genre. The world is rotten and there's nothing you can do about it, no matter how hard you try, so why bother? Even if you're the 'good guy' in the story, you're probably not that good – if you even want to be. It's common for neon-noir protagonists to take a dim view of their society's rules and prefer to operate by their own code. Protagonists may be fundamentally decent deep down, but their circumstances frequently force them to compromise on that decency and resort to less-than-moral (often violent) means to achieve their goals.

So roll with the punches (of which there will be plenty), try to accept your place in the world, and just be glad you're not one of the suckers who's somehow got it even worse than you. Also, try not to get shot.

If you're confused or worry you don't understand neon-noir, I've included a list of some films we think help communicate the idea later (page 12).

WHAT IS HEROIC BLOODSHED?

Heroic bloodshed is a cinema genre focused on hyper-stylised action sequences and bombastic explosions. The themes of heroic bloodshed revolve around violence, honour, family, loyalty, and redemption (usually for the protagonists).

It's like an old kung fu movie, where guns replace the kung fu, and the enemies are almost always corrupt law enforcement, gangsters, or corporate thugs.

Heroic bloodshed tends to feature similar protagonists to those seen in neon-noir, and tends to revolve around concepts of memory, identity, and inequality in similar ways (look no further than *Hard Boiled* to see how inequality is dealt with in the heroic bloodshed genre).

Heroic bloodshed visually focuses on smooth, balletic action, exciting fights, and using violence to communicate core ideas and concepts about the characters. Who you shoot and how you relax is just as important as what you say (usually more so).

WOUNDED SOCIETY

Film critic Imogen Sara Smith said "film noir is like a plant that springs up after fires. It thrives in destabilised and wounded societies."

Noir is generally viewed as the by-product of war and conflict, but many events can wound a society and culture. *Crescendo of Violence* presents a world wounded by an ecological disaster, and fractured by the solutions (which are good and healthy, but misused by those in power).

The scars of this disaster run deep and have caused a societal trauma that is manifested in a "lost generation" of individuals pulled into crime, violence, and escapism (through music, in this case).

BLENDING THE GENRES

With naturally similar protagonists, grey morality, and a tendency to resolve tough situations with fists (or bullets) rather than words, neon-noir and heroic bloodshed have a comfortable overlap.

Protagonists are agile, flowing, and stylised, with explosive, action-packed scenes, but with a dramatic tension based around personal stories. They're almost always nobodies – or less – in the world, trying to do what it takes to get ahead or get by. They're competent, have conflicting loyalties and desires, and run into problems with lovers, friends, family, and employers alike.

They're almost too human, larger than life, while still having small problems and obstacles (that invariably escalate into bigger ones), and having to handle and overcome them is the core thrust of their story.

INSPIRING MEDIA

To get the feel of *Crescendo of Violence*, take all these movies and throw them in a blender. It's a mix of jazz, gun-fu action, and near-future tech noir.

- *Blade Runner* (directed by Ridley Scott)
- *Blade Runner 2049* (directed by Denis Villeneuve)
- *Strange Days* (directed by Kathryn Bigelow)
- *Ghost in the Shell* (the classic anime version)
- *Cowboy Bebop* (the series)
- *Mute* (directed by Duncan Jones)
- *A Better Tomorrow* (directed by John Woo)
- *Hard Boiled* (directed by John Woo)
- *The Killer* (directed by John Woo)
- *Tokyo Drifter* (directed by Seijun Suzuki)
- *Stray Dog* (directed by Akira Kurosawa)
- *The Bad Sleep Well* (directed by Akira Kurosawa)
- *High and Low* (directed by Akira Kurosawa)
- *Drunken Angel* (directed by Akira Kurosawa)
- *Le Samouraï* (directed by Jean-Pierre Melville)
- *Léon: The Professional* (directed by Luc Besson)
- *Bird* (directed by Clint Eastwood)
- *I Called Him Morgan* (directed by Kasper Collin)
- The *John Wick* movie series (directed by Chad Stahelski)

Classic noir films, like *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Big Sleep*, and *Casablanca* are also great touchstones for tones and themes you might incorporate into your game. You can't go wrong with a long list of inspiring media, but your core touchstones are: heroic bloodshed or brutal noir action, criminal elements and morally grey heroes, and jazz-inspired stories.

WHAT IS A ROLEPLAYING GAME?

Crescendo of Violence is a tabletop roleplaying game (or "RPG" for short). If you're not familiar with the concept, roleplaying games are a medium of collaborative storytelling that combines mechanical elements (such as rules, character sheets, and rolling dice) and social conversation to create a compelling adventure and story. If it were a movie, most players would play the main characters and one of them, here called "the Game Master", takes on the role of director. Together, you create the story through play.

Roleplaying games are great, in large part because they are the only storytelling medium where the audience is directly influential upon the narrative. You're the storyteller and the audience at the same time, and that's a truly unique form of story. Most other media (movies, books, even video games) are entirely passive; the audience simply sits and takes in what's occurring. In roleplaying games, the audience gets to directly influence the story by making decisions, offering new ideas and suggestions, and driving the story in the direction they want to see it go. There aren't any constraints other than what the group at your table has decided. There are infinite branches to follow, stories to tell, and choices to be made, in a way that other mediums currently can't offer!

In a roleplaying game, you get to be an actor, a hero, and a villain; get to have flaws, exceptional powers, and experience emotional highs and lows; and get to tell a story that no one else can tell, because the story you and your friends create together at your table is entirely unique!

If you're not familiar with roleplaying games, that's OK! We've worked hard to keep this game as accessible as possible. While there is a lot going on, we do our best to communicate it as clearly as we can. Roleplaying games are often big, complex things with a lot of detailed rules, which can make them feel daunting, so don't hesitate to take a break and digest what you're reading. There's no need to read (let alone fully digest) this book in a single sitting! Also, roleplaying games use a shared language of terminology, which can be a barrier if you've not come across it before, but we'll do our best to explain any of these terms as they come up. Just remember, if you're confused or don't understand something, there are lots of online resources for roleplaying games that should be able to help clear things up for you.

There are two types of player in *Crescendo of Violence*: **Player Characters (PCs)** and the **Game Master (GM)**.

Throughout the game, we might refer to something as "in character" or "out of character". The distinction is relatively simple. In-character actions and behaviours are executed by the character you are playing within the narrative of the game. When you speak in character, you are acting and speaking as though you were that character. Out-of-character actions are those you take as

a player, such as telling a joke about a popular video game series, or referencing a movie. To go back to our movie metaphor, in-character actions are what the movie's characters are doing on the screen, out-of-character actions are what the actors are joking about in between takes.

It's important to maintain enough in-character behaviour to avoid harming anyone's enjoyment, but there's no need to be in character all the time.

PLAYERS

Players are responsible for taking on a single role, that of someone who lives in the world of Neo York – the biggest megapolis on Earth – *circa* 2093, and who deals with the seedy underbelly of the neon world around them as part of their day-to-day existence. They are exceptional, but the world around them is mundane.

The players will direct their character's actions based on how they interpret the game world through the eyes of their character. They will use the history they create for their character, how their character might feel in specific situations, and the action taking place in the game to show how their character grows and changes, both mechanically on their character sheet, as well as in their personality and behaviour.

CINEMATIC ROLEPLAYING

I personally like to structure and view my RPGs as movies, as opposed to literary works. Movies are one of my favourite storytelling media, one I'm very familiar with, and one I really am comfortable talking about.

Sometimes RPGs can feel opaque, confusing, or complicated. But if you think about what I write here as borrowing the cinematic language movies use, it will likely help you interpret what I'm presenting.

While *Crescendo of Violence* is complex (but not complicated), at its core it tries to use a simple cinematic language and presentation. The rules are designed to emulate how movies (and jazz music) work, and to pull on similar threads to create a cohesive, but new experience.

I hope you dig it.

When challenges or risky actions need to be resolved, players will use the rules of the game to determine how the situation plays out.

The players carry many responsibilities in the game:

- Players keep the story moving forward with their actions.
- Players provide drama and excitement by interacting with the game and making decisions as their character. This doesn't mean they always choose the perfect action or decision to "win". Like all people, player characters are flawed and make mistakes. It's a lot of fun to play a character who is imperfect and doesn't always make the best choice in every situation. RPGs are stories to be told, not puzzles to be solved!
- Players work together to ensure everyone at the table (including the Game Master) is having fun.
- Players are as responsible for the narrative and fun at the table as the Game Master is, and should keep that in mind as they help to tell the story.

It's important to be a good player throughout the game. The points we've mentioned are a great first step, but don't ever forget to be considerate of your table mates!

The players' characters are underworld, street-level joes, but at the same time, in the narrative of the game world, they are exceptional by their professions and their lifestyles. We refer to the role and person they play in the game as "characters". Characters are marked out by having something heroic about them and are a cut above the average individual, even if they don't look like much on the surface.

By the time the game is over, the players will have told one hell of a story, but one that the world at large might never know.

THE GAME MASTER

The Game Master is the "director" of this movie you're sharing. They populate the world, they know where the story is going, and they work to help keep you on track. They take on the role of everyone you meet, allies and enemies alike, and Game Masters do their best to ensure that everyone has fun.

They're the adjudicator, referee, and "leader" of the game. In the game world, the GM's word goes. However, it's important to remember that the GM's ultimate goal is to ensure that the story is enjoyable and everyone has a good time.

If you're the GM, you have some serious responsibilities:

- The GM plans the overall story, including the foes and obstacles that the PCs will face.
- The GM takes on the role of everyone the PCs encounter, known as **Non-Player Characters (NPCs)**.
- The GM injects danger, risk, and intrigue into the game world.
- The GM listens to the players, ensuring that they are having fun and enjoying their time together.

If you ever feel stuck or unable to generate the next step in the story as the GM, remember that your biggest resource is on the players' character sheets. The sort of skills, attributes, and abilities the players choose for their characters will always be your biggest clue as to the kind of story they want to see and experience. For example, if a PC has a high focus on combat, that player probably wants to get into conflict, draw their weapons, and shed some blood.

GAME MASTER TIPS

We'll get more into the weeds about being the GM later, but some things to keep in mind (with apologies to Elmore Leonard):

- Describe everything, but not too much.
- Every PC is the star, your job is to make them look good.
- Important decisions in life are hard, so they should be in the game as well.
- Use tropes, but not too many.
- If it sounds like you're narrating, stop it.
- If it's boring to you, it's boring to someone else, so skip it.

We talk a lot more about the job of the GM on page 85, and it's good practice for any GM to read through this book a few times to really get a grasp on the details.

WHAT YOU NEED

Crescendo of Violence is played with ten-sided dice (referred to as d10s), this book, character sheets, and a variety of tokens (we'll talk more about those later). Everything else is optional!

DICE

You'll need about ten d10s, or ten-sided dice, to play *Crescendo of Violence*. You can find these in most hobby game stores or online. Throughout this book, we'll write dice rolls as "roll Xd10", where the X stands for how many dice you should roll. For example, "roll 3d10" means roll three ten-sided dice and take the highest result. If you need to add the results together, it will be made clear in notation (such as "1d10+1d10").

ACTION TOKENS

Each player will need a **green**, **yellow**, and **red** token in front of them. These could be beads, poker chips, coins in various denominations, or whatever works best for you, as long as you can tell which is which.

We use the colours and refer to them as "action tokens" throughout the game, so just make sure you're aware of what that means going forward.

MOMENTUM TOKENS

Each player will need up to five Momentum tokens. These can be whatever you'd like, as long as you can tell them apart from the action tokens.

MINIS, MAPS, AND TERRAIN

Some groups like miniatures, maps, or terrain on their tabletop. While the game isn't explicitly written to support such things, it's not too hard to use them effectively with *Crescendo of Violence*. Miniatures, maps, and terrain are a decision each group makes on their own!

CHARACTER SHEETS

Each player will need a character sheet to record the details of their character on. You'll create this PC before you play and they're who you'll play throughout the game (unless they die, in which case you'll have to make a new one!).

You can find the character sheet online at **ospreypublishing.com/gaming_resources_roleplaying**, or you can print the one at the back of this book.

OTHER NEEDS

You'll need pencils, paper (for notes and scratch paper), and any snacks or drinks you want. Most roleplaying sessions last 2–4 hours, so you should plan for adequate breaks, drinks and food, and time to chit-chat and hang out.

Roleplaying is a fun social activity, so don't forget to enjoy the time spent with your friends!

WHAT TO USE AS TOKENS

During playtesting some folks used the following as action tokens:

- Coins
- Poker chips
- Decks of cards (Jack for Red, Queen for Yellow, King for Green)

As long as what you are using is clear to everyone playing, you can use whatever works best.

As an idea, when we used poker chips during playtesting, we also wrote what each one did in sharpie on one side. Once used, we'd just turn it face down, so everyone could see as an easy reference what everyone had in front of them.

For Momentum tokens, we've used a variety of items:

- Poker chips (of a different colour)
- Glass beads
- Large d20s (one each, with the number on the die showing the number of available tokens)

THE MOST IMPORTANT DETAIL

We've saved the best and most important detail for last.

Roleplaying games are a group activity. Maximising the fun of the group is the only way to win. To that end, these rules were made to be broken, hacked, and mutilated.

Stories should be exciting and heart-pounding thrills should abound, so if a rule gets in the way of that, change it or ignore it! A game like this is a framework for your group to build on and alter as needed, with the ultimate goal being to maximise your enjoyment of the story you sit down to tell with your friends.

Being respectful and kind to your group is always the most important thing to keep in mind. It's sad to lose friends over playing pretend at the table. Be gracious and give leeway to learn, grow, and enjoy each other's company. No one is perfect, but communicating openly and honestly (a theme we'll repeat) solves almost every problem that can crop up at the tabletop.

GMs should remember to take time to ask how the game is going. Check in with your players. Make sure they're enjoying the game. Ask how you can improve, and don't take it personally when mistakes happen or enjoyment flags. Being the GM is a lot of hard work and you won't be perfect all the time, every time. That's OK! Just regroup and keep trying.

Players, make sure the GM knows when they do something you like or run a scene you enjoy. If you feel like something you want to experience isn't happening in the game, it's OK to bring it up after the game with the GM. Just remember that the GM already has a story idea, and some things won't fit. They'll do their best to juggle everyone's wants and needs but a good group realises that it's not all about themselves, and they can share the spotlight, enjoying and cheering on their allies' victories, mourning their friends' defeats, and making sure that everyone gets their chance to shine.

THE WORLD AROUND YOU

A TIMELINE OF THE WORLD

- **2030:** Ecological disaster leads to catastrophic flooding along the world's coastlines. Emergency action prevents the worst of the potential damage as island and coastal nations respond quickly by scuttling ships, cargo containers, and airplanes to create wave breaks and seawalls.
- **2031:** The Pacific Maritime Wars begin as economic destabilisation caused by the ecological collapse spreads.
- **2032:** New laws are passed to mitigate and overcome the obstacles to humanity's survival provoked by the collapse.
- **2033:** The UN declares a worldwide state of emergency, which is immediately challenged and ignored by many of its member states. This rift between the major global powers leads some of the countries previously excluded from the higher corridors of power to form their own "Shadow UN" within the struggling organisation. They operate as a secret alliance within the UN, working to ensure that their goals are met, while the old powers are too busy sniping and trying to gain advantage over each other to preserve their status.
- **2034:** The first drift generator, or "drift-gen", is created and deployed.
- **2035:** Repeltech is first experimented with in a real-world environment. New York City is floated, along with most other surviving major US coastal metropolises.
- **2037:** The African Coalition is formed, a loose confederation of allied African nations aiming to empower their voices on the world stage. They find themselves informally allied with the Shadow UN.
- **2040:** In an attempt to stabilise the still-volatile economy, the UN creates the Global Fiscal Token (GFT), a heavily monitored supranational digital currency.

- **2041:** The first UN Wars begin as the African Coalition and Shadow UN exert their power, catching out the old guard of the UN Security Council, who suddenly find their grasp on power has evaporated.
- **2043:** As the UN Wars rage, several countries find themselves switching sides as new governments, coming to power off the back of either the ballot box or an armed coup, realign their loyalties according to ideology and realpolitik alike. An attempt is made to destabilise the world economy by launching a cyber-attack against the GFT Bank and Investment Fund. The Shadow UN enacts a violent reprisal against the hackers, sinking a small floating city. This act of brutality sends a clear warning to those who might consider another such attack.
- **2044:** The UN War ends. The UN Security Council is reformed, now with rotating membership, with none of its previous members in the first set. The new Security Council sets in motion a set of reforms that constitute a total reform of the global economy, although they will take years to fully deploy.
- **2048:** WETnet, a wireless energy distribution technology, is developed and first deployed in Africa.
- **2050:** South East Asia announces the creation of a new fiscal token called SEAft (pronounced "C-aft"). It quickly surpasses the GFT as the world's primary currency.
- **2051:** Through a series of mergers, acquisitions, and backroom deals made possible by the world of the economic crisis, the first megacorporation is born: Global Omnitech Corporation, abbreviated to "Glomni" by its multitude of detractors.
- **2052–2055**: Many more megacorporations are born, often seemingly overnight through sudden mergers and acquisitions, as well as frequent quasi-legal dealings. The UN World Bank and several state governments work to curb the power of these megacorps, to little avail.
- **2058:** The New York Megacity begins to form with the passage of the Halvin-Scott Act.
- **2059:** The first human clone is born, sparking a crisis in international human rights legislation that will take several years to resolve.
- **2060:** The Corporate War begins as Global Omnitech Corporation executes a hostile takeover of the British government for debts owed. The war rapidly escalates as the USA and most of the EU are drawn into the conflict, but the combined might of NATO and its UN allies is enough to swiftly crush Global Omintech's private military. Although the war ultimately lasted only a few months, it leaves the affected stock markets in ruin, as they are completely unable to cope with a war between corporations and nations.

- **2061:** The first truly independent AI, Logos, is created to manage what could be salvaged of the world's stock markets and financial systems, though it rapidly expands to cover other functions as the UN, giddy with its success, further empowers it.
- **2062:** The first holo-play is aired, a holographic movie that plays out in a public performance space. The UN passes the landmark Life Preservation Human Rights Act (LPHRA), guaranteeing human rights protections to clones and similar lifeforms (though notably excluding AIs). Even with the LPHRA, clones remain almost universally working class, born into poverty.
- **2063:** The UN announces that 100% of the world is WETnet enabled.
- **2067:** New York announces that it will be renamed Neo York.
- **2068:** Logos thwarts a corporate takeover attempt against a group of smaller African nations. The African Coalition demands that a neutral arbiter be put in place to safeguard against corporations exploiting a recovering economy. The UN authorises the construction of Isla Logos, an island dedicated to storing, maintaining, and supporting the Logos AI.
- **2071:** NATO creates its own financial token, NATOft, as more alliances attempt to grab hold of the world economic system through currencies. Non-governmental fiscal tokens are outlawed, creating a black market centred around laundered and hacked fiscal tokens.
- **2072:** The advent of fiscal tokens, as well as careful economic management by Logos, breaks the megacorporations; only a dozen survive, and those still have their power greatly diminished. The final blow is dealt when laws are passed preventing private companies from acquiring or possessing military equipment or weaponry, except with specific licensing. Any remaining hope for a corporate revival is snuffed out when a hacker known as *Zero.Geist* discovers, and absconds with, over 200 billion GFTs' worth of illegal fiscal tokens the megacorporations have been hoarding and using to fuel their illicit transactions. A brief war breaks out between the megacorps and the UN, dubbed The Second UN War, but it's quickly quashed as Logos aids the UN in denying the megacorps access to their WETnet and repeltech equipment.
- **2073:** The UN announces a consolidation of all fiscal tokens into the GFT, but with each regional alliance managing the FTs in their territory, overseen by the World Bank. Logos is granted final control of all economic matters.
- **2074:** The first bioroid is created. New legislation guaranteeing clone and bioroid rights is passed, guaranteeing artificially created lifeforms fiscal safety nets and safe working conditions.

- **2075:** The *Gallant*, a new space station, is launched to serve as a habitat station, halfway between Earth and the Moon. Later that year, the *Indomitable*, a second habitat station, is launched halfway between Earth and Mars.
- **2077:** Scientists announce that a breakthrough in drift-gen technology has occurred, promising near-limitless energy. Several prominent political and scientific voices proclaim that humanity is fast approaching a post-scarcity society.
- **2083:** The Shadow War breaks out. Various nations enter a proxy war, both economic and military, as the move towards a post-scarcity society disrupts the plans of the wealthy and powerful. The conflict is a tangled mess, with allies one day being enemies the next. Waves of conscription take place, with nations relying on a twisted form of patriotism to justify conscripting their citizens into military service. Despite the long-standing ban on private companies possessing military equipment, mercenary companies crop up like weeds to profit off the conflict.
- **2085–2086:** The Shadow War erupts into a full-scale military conflict. NATO finally fractures and collapses, as its former members turn on each other in an attempt to control and limit post-scarcity technology.
- **2088:** A fusion bomb is accidentally detonated over Los Angeles by mercenaries employed by the United States government. The catastrophic loss of life brings an abrupt end to the Shadow War, as the UN bans all post-scarcity technologies that are deemed non-essential (functionally only allowing WETnet, repeltech, and standard drift-gens) until further studies and recommendations can be made. All but the richest and most powerful are plunged into a state of near-poverty almost overnight.
- **2092:** The economic depression that has persisted since the banning of post-scarcity technology begins to abate, but there is yet to be any sign of reprieve for the impoverished poor or middle class.
- **2093:** The current year.

FILLING IN THE DETAIL

Most of the events mentioned in the timeline are left as broad brushstrokes, letting you fill in the blanks to grow your own story from them. However, there are some important details to note:

- In many ways, the world has overcome the immediacy of the corporate threats of the cyberpunk genre. Most megacorporations are broken. While there are still hyper-capitalist corporations, they don't wield the economic, political, social, or military power they once did. The idea of a single corporation dominating every aspect of your life or standing above (or even on a par with) national governments is outdated. The remaining megacorps, while still influential, will never again rise to the heights they once achieved. Logos has seen to that.
- As of 2093, humanity has made significant technological advancements, including in cybernetics, AI, and wireless energy. For the most part, this advanced technology is simply accepted as a normal part of everyday life, but the Shadow War looms large in recent memory, and most of the global population still suffers because of the UN's ban on post-scarcity technology.
- Clones and bioroids are a fact of society. For the most part, they are at least tolerated by natural-born humans, but positive sentiment towards them is far from universal (just as positive sentiment towards other humans remains far from universal). Clones and bioroids still primarily constitute an underclass, but they have been afforded legal protections that guarantee them a fiscal safety net and opportunities for education and varied employment, rather than being shackled to the singular job they were originally created for.

THE VIEW FROM THE END OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Things ain't the way they used to be, that's for sure. Welcome to Neo York, the biggest city in the world. It's grown to occupy most of the north-eastern coast of North America (as well as a chunk of the Atlantic), subsuming other major cities into its boroughs and suburbs.

In the year 2030, a catastrophic climate event finally happened. Humanity had spent a long time ruining the world, and the world finally ruined us right back. A massive series of tidal waves were unleashed by ice floes splitting and suddenly plunging into the ocean in rapid succession, causing environmental destruction on a scale unprecedented in recorded history.

Faced with an onslaught of sudden flooding, vanishing coastlines, and dramatically shifting weather patterns, compounded by the almost-overnight annihilation of maritime trade and ensuing disruption to the agriculture and manufacturing sectors, the reality of life irrevocably changed.

In 2032 a series of laws were passed in rapid succession by every major nation, outlawing most forms of energy creation that weren't deemed renewable and diverting significant resources to scientific and technological solutions to the environmental collapse.

Three solutions were found.

First, a new source of energy generation was found in the form of a new technology called **tidal drift harnessing**, colloquially just called "drift". Using this breakthrough technology, power generators were built to draw energy from the intrinsic motion of tidal movement. These ocean-bound "drift-gens" can be relocated by simply floating them to a new location, or even just be left bobbing in an ocean, as technological advancements in wireless energy translocation mean that the energy they produce can be tapped by an invisible worldwide web of energy that connects all electrical devices.

Second, this wireless energy network – called the "**WETnet**" – prompted an upsurge in the production and use of electric vehicles, as well as a new brand of repulsion technology that makes the old sci-fi staple of flying cars a viable reality. This **repeltech** uses the WETnet to surround flying vehicles with a hyper-charged field of energy that keeps them from colliding into objects or other vehicles (under most circumstances, at least). Lots of modern technology relies on this repeltech and the WETnet to turn age-old fantasy into scientific fact.

Finally, **coastal cities** were turned into massive, floating architectural behemoths, surrounded by drift-gens and powered by the WETnet. The biggest coastal cities and now survive loosely anchored near (or even in) their original locations, but immune to the shifting tides and seascape as they ride out the changes in the world.

Some things, however, never change. Much as throughout most of its history, humanity somehow manages to solve their problems in the worst possible way. While WETnet and repeltech have allowed us to create new solutions to age-old problems, we are constantly using age-old problems to undermine our solutions. Corporations have attempted to lock down new and emerging technologies (such as Global Fiscal Tokens, or GFTs, a digital currency created by the UN) in their eternal effort to turn a profit on our society-saving inventions. Governments have fallen, risen, merged, and fallen again as the world's geopolitical landscape has changed over the century, often violently. People spend a lot more time looking for an escape from modern technology, falling into crime, movies, music, and sex a lot more than they used to (or so the media says).

What's old is new again; synth-jazz, holo-plays (high-fidelity 3D hologram movies), and giant criminal mobs are all back in style, as are the fedoras that go with them. It's a new Jazz Age, just with a bit more neon than the last one.

We've figured out a lot of new stuff; the WETnet powers cybernetic implants and bioroids, drift-gens allow for the founding of new floating outposts and towns, and humanity is a lot more mobile, but also a lot more isolated. It ain't all sunshine and daisies, but it's a damn sight better than it could have been.

How does all this impact Neo York in the year 2093? A lot, my friend. A lot.

AI AND LOGOS

There are multiple AIs present throughout the world of *Crescendo of Violence*, but there is only one that is truly *intelligent*: Logos.

While there are smaller AIs with hard and fast limitations (mostly in the form of limited computing power) that keep them manageable for humans, Logos is the only AI that has fully outstripped humanity. It exists as an entirely separate entity, with its own fully formed reality around it.

Logos has immense power, both in terms of its authority over the global economy and the technological resources at its disposal (enormous server farms of computing power for a start). Its ability to process, manipulate, and leverage data is second to none.

The UN claims there are safeguards in place to prevent Logos from attempting anything you might have read about or seen in a low-budget holo-play, but they've never disclosed exactly what those safeguards are.

NEO YORK

Formerly known as New York, Neo York is currently the largest metropolis in the world. Desperately floated in the worst of the 2030s flooding, large parts of old New York City were submerged or destroyed. What survived was a complex tangle of smaller boroughs and other former coastal towns that spent the next two decades crossing paths and bumping into each other, merging and separating in turns until in 2058, when the New York City government decided it'd had enough.

Since New York was the largest global purchaser of drift-gens, they used their considerable market influence to pressure the leading drift-gen manufacturers to limit how many they sold to other cities. New York then announced a new measure to allow other cities to become sub-districts, gaining the right to lease New York's drift-gens to power their cities at the cost of subordinating themselves to the New York City government.

Smaller cities flocked to the deal. The prospect of gaining access to both drift power *and* a slice of New York's wealth was too good an opportunity to pass up. Dozens of cities were floated to New York, merging as subservient vassals to the greater power of the Big Apple. In about a year, New York City tripled in size, coming to dominate a significant portion of the new coastline, as well as extending its reach deep into the Atlantic.

New York became the first megacity, and they knew it. Some commentators suggested that this sounded somewhat ominous and threatening.

They didn't know the half of it.

It quickly became apparent that New York had no intention of giving any of these districts anything approaching governmental autonomy or independence. The city had just gained a load of taxable new citizens, and they intended to make sure they got every last tax GFT out of them.

By steadily tightening laws and raising taxes over the last 35 years, New York has become more akin to the NYC of the 1920s and 30s Jazz Age than you might expect for a city at the end of the 21st century. Floating skyscrapers and penthouses dot the sky, as grimy yellow taxis hover their way down the alleys and streets below.

Overall, the technological advancements since 2030 have reduced poverty (very few folks actually live in absolute poverty), but there is definitely a clear economic stratification in Neo York society and everyone knows it.

One of the biggest advances to preserving old New York was the discovery that repeltech could create large underwater bubbles. With this novel application of repeltech, lost landmarks and sites could be refurbished as underwater museums, and then sealed off with repeltech to create an unusual dry experience surrounded by the waves, accessible by a convenient surface elevator. Several previously "lost" locations, such as the Empire State Building, were saved and refurbished, now serving as event centres, museums, and more.

In 2067 the New York City government reached two conclusions. The first was that it wanted its independence from the United States. The second was that it needed a new name. Through a series of petitions, referenda, bribery, public demonstrations, media campaigns, corruption scandals, and a large-scale riot, the city settled on Neo York as the name for the "City of the 22nd Century". Some would say the subsequent negotiations with the US federal government, which allowed Neo York to declare itself an independent city state while binding it as a "sister-state" in a common trade and free-movement area, was the smoother process. Both the city's name and its peculiar relationship with the United States remain a controversial topic in some quarters.

Today, Neo York is an entity unto itself, and it's made what was considered a pretty unique city even more vibrant and exciting.

AUGMENTED REALITY (AR)

The use of augmented reality is pretty commonplace for most folks, via either cybernetic eye implants or AR glasses (which are surprisingly cheap), with data transferred to the chosen device via the WETnet.

This means everything that's WETnet-enabled allows you to see an enhanced version of reality. Given the pervasiveness of the technology, pretty much anything could be overlaid by AR holograms (and often is). You can conveniently interact with jukeboxes, access panels, and pay bills via AR and your WETnet device – if you can put up with all the ads, that is.

No more staring at screens, my friend. It's all AR from here on out.

A LIST OF NEO YORK'S DISTRICTS

Not every district is outlined here. This is deliberate, allowing you to fill in, create, or define some of the districts yourself, putting your own spin on Neo York. Below is a list of districts that exist for you to build from:

1. **OLD YORK:** Formerly Manhattan, the Bronx, Staten Island, Queens, and Brooklyn (often just called O-York).
   Code: OY. **Slang Name:** Oi.
2. **CHINATOWN:** A colloquial name for Kangxia, a Chinese city floated to Neo York.
   Code: KX. **Slang Name:** Sha.
3. **NEW HAVERFORD:** A former West Coast town floated to Neo York.
   Code: NH. **Slang Name:** NuH (pronounced "n-uh").
4. **AVONDALE SKYPARK:** a derogatory name for the floating penthouses and skyscrapers that cluster the skies over Old York, from which the wealthy literally look down on the rest of the city.
   Code: AS. **Slang Name:** Residents use "Avon", but everyone else calls it "Ass Park" (or "Glass Park" if you're in polite company).
5. **CASHTOWN:** The site of New Wall Street, where the financial institutions of Neo York are all clumped into one place.
   Code: NW. **Slang Name:** NuWall.
6. **LITTLE ITALY:** A primarily Italian-American district, the Neo Nostra's seat of power in Neo York.
   Code: LI. **Slang Name:** Lit.
7. **PORT EAST:** The easternmost district, where most of the import-export labour happens.
   Code: PE. **Slang Name:** NuPe (pronounced "new-p" or "nuup").
8. **WEST RUSSIA:** The colloquial name for the Russian ethnic enclave attached to Neo York (a lot of folks found the original name very hard to pronounce and it's fallen out of use).
   Code: WR. **Slang Name**: No one really gives it one. It's just West Russia or Little Moscow.
9. **NEW BEALE:** A district known for its high volume of synth-jazz clubs, nightspots, and hangouts.
   Code: NB. **Slang Name**: Jazz Street.

NEO YORK IN A SNAPSHOT

Founded: 2067 (from New York City, New York)

Population: 28,000,000

Government: Weak-mayor government system, with districts overseen by city managers who are directly appointed by the city council. The city council is (technically) democratically elected, with one representative from each of the 31 districts of the city. These city managers, often referred to as "**Department Directors"** by the common populace, hold most of the real power in the city. The mayor instead serves as a public face and media head for the city council (who make all decisions and appoint the Department Directors).

Primary Industries: Entertainment, global logistics services, technology development.

Famous Landmarks: Various old New York landmarks still stand, but are eclipsed by more exciting new ones. The new repeltech City Hall floats over what was Central Park, and the old Empire State Building is now an underwater museum.

Weather: Neo York has a primarily wet and cool climate, with mild summers and winters commonly hovering just above freezing. Precipitation is near-constant (ranging from light drizzle on a good day to a torrential downpour on a bad one), with severe fog on the rare day the rain stops. The unexpected upside to this forever-rain is that Neo York has surprisingly clean air for such a major metropolis, further enhanced by all the repeltech vehicles and buildings (the WETnet tends to electrically charge the air enough that most small particles end up zapped away).

Culture: Neo York is a diverse megapolis, both culturally and ethnically, being a literal collection of multiple cities and towns – most, but not all, from the United States. A common example used when explaining how it has changed is that "Chinatown" is now literally a town from China that floated over and merged with Neo York as a sub-district, rather than a part of town heavily settled by Chinese immigrants.

This unique brand of cultural integration has two major benefits. First, each district gets to elect its own representative to the city council, which means that representatives of a district are often (though not always) culturally of the district they represent, ensuring that district's voice is clearly communicated on the city council. Secondly, each district gets an equal voice in city government, though

the funds they receive are limited by their tax revenue (a deliberately inefficient system that is designed to prevent redistribution and keep the rich wealthy).

Citizens are defined by a personal ID code. If you're born in Neo York, you get a number that starts with NY followed by your district code, year of birth, and an RNG seven-digit code. So, if you were born in Old York in 2071, your code might be: NY-OY-2071-5218794. Because of this abbreviated code, districts are often given slang names as a colloquial shorthand.

Where you're from in Neo York matters a lot to a lot of people, and most folks wear their home district proudly. Each district has its own style, and you can often tell where someone is from by how they dress. Sometimes this manifests as a more distinct cultural or ethnic style of clothing, or it can simply be the choice of which lapel you display your holo-badge over.

Neo York's a big, complicated city, and that isn't gonna change any time soon.

WHO LIVES IN NEO YORK?

THE ELITE

First, let's talk about the movers and shakers around town. The elite. The one percent. These are the folks that live in the floating penthouses of Neo York, the glass abodes that stare down at the city from the sky above.

The elite almost never need to set foot on the ground, living the high life in the sky. Being one of the elite means being invited to all the best parties, getting into synth-jazz clubs without waiting in line, getting reservations at the best restaurants, and private shopping at the best stores (or having your hired help shop at them for you).

Most of those wealthy enough to own a skyhouse generally have very little actual work to do (the board of directors does most of it for them), preferring to spend their time in idle luxury. Many own multiple skyhouses, both as a way of competing for prestige and of filling the empty hours. Most of the skyhouses are guarded by private security, and localised rapid response teams can be deployed quickly.

Larger sky estates are built by connecting multiple skyhouses into a labyrinthine complex, replete with garages, servants' quarters, high-security saferooms, and more.

Of course, some of those who reach the top got there by less-than-legitimate means. However, old money is the primary source of the elite's wealth for the most part. These are people who are wealthy because their names mean wealth,

and the actual money follows along after. Wealth in the 2090s is demonstrated by accruing extravagant physical possessions such as rare art, pre-2030s artefacts, and other relics. The wealthy do a robust trade in top-of-the-line smuggled goods, as well as regularly displaying their wealth at museums (and having the nerve to call it a philanthropic public service).

SUITS

The suits are the corporate drones, mid-level managers, and government bureaucrats of Neo York and its resident corporations. Ranging from the relatively wealthy to the lower middleclass, suits make their living doing white-collar work, and enjoy all the perks and benefits that come with it: a nice-enough apartment, pretty good restaurants, and steady employment.

BLUES

Derived from the term "blue-collar", blues are the ones who staff the low-wage manual labour and service industry jobs. Generally seen as society's bottom rung, blues get the worst of just about everything. Nearly all clones and bioroids are blues, and they tend to have it worst of all.

ENTERTAINERS

Entertainers are considered a unique class in Neo York. Ranging from holo-play stars through club dancers and synth-jazz players down to street performers, entertainers of all stripes enjoy a certain social privilege, such as getting preferential treatment for restaurant reservations and being let off speeding tickets.

THE WEALTHIEST PEOPLE IN NEO YORK

1. **Abbington Pierpont**, heir to the powerful Pierpont media empire. Abbington is best known for throwing extravagant parties and being a constant presence in the tabloids.
2. **Yamasaki Sakiko**, a powerful tech mogul. Sakiko is the mind behind the new social media platform *Local*, an always-live system that attaches an automatically updating AR newsfeed to its members that can be seen by other *Local* users around them.
3. **Isadora Pennington**, the tabloid-friendly daughter of Lord Isaac Pennington of the British royal family. Despite being a famous litigator, the gutter press constantly runs stories linking her to organised crime.
4. **Lei Zhenya**, a fabulously wealthy industrialist and Chinese immigrant. Zhenya is the owner of ZhenyaComp, a microcomputing manufacturer and WETnet developer that is one of the most powerful corporations in China.
5. **The Rowan family**, some of the world's most well-renowned artists. The Rowan family is best known for works in antiquated media, such as 2D video, and are a dominant force in the Neo York museum scene.
6. **Valera Romarovich**, a communications mogul and famous ballet dancer. Valera is the head of the Romarovich media empire, which includes one of the world's most successful music labels.
7. **Humphrey Darlington-Whit**, an A-List holo-play actor. Humphrey's name is said to triple the profits of any holo he stars in.
8. **Song Hai**, currently the most famous jazz singer in the world. Song is a critical darling for experimental avant-garde compositions, but the general public prefers her old stuff.
9. **Aldo Venturi**, a legitimate businessman. Aldo is head of the Venturi family, the most powerful family of the Neo Nostra. Not that anyone's been able to prove that he's involved in anything illegal, of course.
10. **Lorelei Musgrave**, a celebrated holo-playwright and author. Lorelei is hailed as a genius and is touted as having single-handedly brought about a golden age of crime fiction.

CRIME

You can't talk about Neo York without talking about organised crime. Merging a bunch of cities from across the world into a single megapolis came with some baggage, the most significant of which turned out to be organised crime.

In the 1960s and 70s, New York was synonymous with the Sicilian Mafia, and over a century later they have reasserted themselves as a major player in Neo York's criminal underworld. However, the addition of international districts during Neo York's formation has brought a resurgence of multinational criminal elements to the city.

NEO NOSTRA

The classic gangsters of American cinema, when someone says "mafia", this is generally who they're referring to. While the name "Cosa Nostra" classically refers to the Sicilian Mafia, holo-plays have popularised the term "Neo Nostra", which has taken root in the minds of general public as the go-to term for the American Mafia.

Ruled by the Commission, a council formed from the dons of the Five Families, the Neo Nostra functions like the mafia crime families of old, with bosses, capos, made men, and the rest. Collectively, the Neo Nostra has its hands in everything from illegal gambling operations, extortion, and protection rackets to drug trafficking, fencing, and union racketeering.

Their centre of power is Little Italy, a heavily Italian-American district that has been merged with a small Sicilian town that was floated over in 2083.

The Five Families

The following are the five families that currently form the Commission, the ruling council of the Neo Nostra.

Barrichello

The Barrichello family is the weakest of the five families of the Neo Nostra. The family's primary trade is white-collar financial crime, with their main operations based in Cashtown, turning a healthy profit in insider trading, money laundering, and outright fraud. When the need arises, they tend to rely on outside muscle to accomplish their dirty work (often borrowed from one of the other five families), but their fiscal acumen and large-scale money-laundering operation helps keep the Neo Nostra's books clean; no one wants to get taken down like Al Capone.

The head of the Barrichello family is Lucrezia Barrichello, a fiscal wunderkind who has leapfrogged his way to prominence over more senior members of the family by having an innate grasp on the rapidly changing economic system that has arisen in the last few decades. Lucrezia is inexperienced when it comes to running a criminal empire, and the other family heads tend to exploit this during meetings and negotiations.

Iannelli

The Iannellis control the Port East labour unions, and they use this control to smuggle illicit goods into and out of Neo York, as well as keeping bribery and corruption a central part of the import-export business's standard operating procedure. The family also has its hands in clone and bioroid production as a legitimate business interest.

The head of the Iannelli family is nominally Celestina Iannelli, although rumour has it that her identical twin daughters, Eleonora and Sebastiana, actually handle the family business.

Oldani

The Oldani family's operation runs the gamut of criminal activities, and is the closest to the classical mafioso that pop culture would have you picturing. Extortion, illegal gambling, and protection rackets are the money-makers here, and most of the knee-breakers and mooks you might bump into on the street tend to be Oldani.

The head of the Oldani family is Vincente Oldani, an old-school knee-breaker commonly referred to as "The Surgeon of Little Italy" for his precise and graphic violence, which he employs to keep his hold on power. Vincente is getting old, however, and younger Oldani capos are starting to angle for his position.

Petralia

The Petralia family focuses on political crimes, trying to get their advocates (and those friendly to the Neo Nostra) elected to Neo York city government. Most of higher ups in the Petralia family live in Glasstown, not Little Italy, which is a source of not insignificant conflict between them and the other families.

Riccardo "Ricky" Petralia is the head of the family, and is currently the city councillor for Glasstown (functionally granting the Neo Nostra two votes on the city council: Ricky and Angela Esposito, the councillor for Little Italy).

Venturi

The most powerful of the Neo Nostra families, the Venturi serve as the head of the table, tending to have the loudest voice and biggest sway on the Commission. The source of the Venturis' power is their control over Neo York's drift-gen network and WETnet infrastructure, as well as much of the city's construction industry. Most of the other families' soldiers and capos will listen to a Venturi, as it's just good business.

The head of the Venturi family is Aldo Venturi, a slick, capable, and hyper-intelligent man who has little compassion for those weaker than him. Aldo's biggest concern at hand is ensuring that the Neo Nostra avoids an inter-familial war, weakening their position against the Yakuza and Triads.

THE YAKUZA

The Yakuza have been present in Neo York nearly as long as the mafia has, although they haven't captured the popular imagination in the same way. The Yakuza are a complex group of criminals, making it difficult to give a full account of their impact, as well as the unique culture of their families and organisation.

Known for the sophistication of their operation, the Yakuza operate out of Nishifukuoka (a Japanese district of Neo York) and Port East, where they regularly come into conflict with the Neo Nostra. The Yakuza operate a pseudo-feudal structure, seeing themselves as protectors of the common folk and often offering charity and protection to average members of society. The Yakuza follow a code of conduct focused on community and semi-legal activity.

Generally speaking, the Yakuza families of Neo York operate a criminal empire based on real estate, stock manipulation, and protection rackets, and prefer to eschew drug and human trafficking, punishing their members who engage in such activities. They also often work as intermediaries between other criminal organisations, leveraging their semi-legitimate reputation to accomplish tasks other criminal organisations can't.

THE TRIADS

Based in Chinatown, the Triads are Chinese and Chinese-American criminals who engage in drug trafficking, money laundering, fraud, and counterfeiting. Unlike the Neo Nostra (who are literal families, with associates) and the Yakuza (who are a semi-legitimate business operation), the Triads are far closer to the standard idea of a criminal gang. No familial ties bind them together, and each Triad gang tends to operate out of its own territory and set its own goals and priorities.

This is not to say that the Triads are any less of a threat to Neo York than the Neo Nostra and the Yakuza. The Triads' drug-running operations are sophisticated, and they have no problem ruling a neighbourhood by fear.

Whereas the Neo Nostra infiltrate law enforcement and the Yakuza make deals with them, the Triads just kill any cops who get in their way, no questions asked, and they'll do the same to anyone else who crosses them. This has made it very difficult to convince the Neo York Police Department to take serious action against the Triads, as the police much prefer to deal with the nicer criminals who will pay them to not investigate them.

OTHER CRIMINAL ORGANISATIONS

Other criminal organisations are alive and well in Neo York, such as the Russian Bratva, the Mac Carthaigh mob, several drug cartels, and various others. As is to be expected, since Neo York's imported districts make it such a diverse melting pot of cultures, organised crime is varied and international in nature.

And that's without even getting on to the subject of cyber-crime, which is a whole underworld unto itself. However, while large criminal organisations dabble in cyber-crime, it is primarily the purview of individuals. Top-tier hackers and cyber-criminals are notoriously arrogant and would never consider sharing their glory with a whole family.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

As one might expect in a city captured by resurgent criminal organisations, Neo York's police force is horrendously corrupt. Everyone knows someone in one of the criminal organisations, and the cops are no exception. Everyone gets leaned on at some point.

The only difference is, as a cop, you have to choose between looking the other way and getting paid, or stepping in and getting shot.

Most cops choose to get paid.

Pretty much everyone knows this. Average citizens avoid the cops whenever they can. There are some things that you need to call the local precinct to deal with, stuff like serial killers, hyper-violent crime, and daylight bank robberies, but generally speaking? No chance. The boys in blue aren't gonna help you, in fact they're probably going to hurt you for "wasting police time".

Powerful regional police chiefs are often bought off by criminal elements, and local cops are all but guaranteed to be on the payroll. If you do happen to have a run in with a member of the Neo York Police Department, the best advice is to just tuck your chin and go with it.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND NOIR

It's a common noir trope that law enforcement is either inept, corrupt, or uncaring. Film noir generally takes a cynical approach to law enforcement and most of the law's heroes are often private investigators or officers on their way out.

PCs in *Crescendo of Violence* are heroes of both the film noir and heroic bloodshed genres, meaning that they're often looking for redemption or a way out of a bad situation. A player whose character works in law enforcement is likely to be confronted with corrupt superiors (or one of the few honest cops as a superior) or working undercover with criminals. Either way, they will have to wrestle with their place in the corrupt system they inhabit.

Criminals, on the other hand, know who they are and wear it on their sleeve.

LIFESTYLE

So, what does an average day and night look like for an average joe in 2090s Neo York?

In short, it's a big, complicated mess. The average citizen goes to work, goes home to their little apartment in a high-rise or multi-floor co-op housing structure, and eats some dinner. Maybe they catch a holo-play re-run, or, more likely, a synth-jazz concert.

But the heroes of our stories aren't average joes, are they?

So what do the coolest and hippest cats do for entertainment in 2093? They see the latest holo-plays on show, they go to synth-jazz clubs, and they hang out with their friends in smoky lounges.

HOLO-PLAYS

Holo-plays (or just "holos" if you're in a hurry) are the 2090s' primary form of mass-market entertainment. By this point a well-established industry, holo-plays are to the people of 2093 what movies are to us in 2022, except that rather than sitting in a cinema to watch the action play out on the silver screen, the 3D, all-around performances in holo-theatres put audiences right in the middle of the action.

In recent years, a particularly lurid sub-genre of fast-paced, brightly coloured, exploitation holo-plays has become a staple of "low" culture, especially amongst the young. Dubbed "neons" for their signature harsh colour palette, the increasing popularity of these holo-plays is frequently cited by self-righteous guardians of good taste as yet more evidence that modern society is going down the recycler. To the consternation of their critics, this moral outcry only seems to bolster the viewing figures for the latest neons, even as they become ever more shocking and graphic.

SYNTH-JAZZ

Synth-jazz is everywhere. My friend, it is **the** music of the 2090s. It's on the street, in your apartment, in every store, every ad uses it, and it's what your colleague puts on at work. Synth-jazz is, in a word, inescapable.

Sometime in the 2070s, the emergence of synth-jazz grabbed the public imagination and has yet to let go, gaining in popularity year on year until it feels like it's almost subsumed every other musical genre entirely. It was the first to embrace new repeltech instruments and WETnet-enhanced audio to

create an entirely new sound, dramatically different to anything the world had heard before, and has remained dominant ever since.

A popular theory to explain the dominance of synth-jazz is that it is one of the last few remaining "true crafts". In 2093, it is possible for people to download knowledge and skills directly into their central nervous systems, bypassing the need for time-intensive practice or training, and that's not to mention bioroids and clones who can be created from scratch to excel at a particular task. Only a handful of crafts resist this shortcut to mastery, with synth-jazz being the most famous example. To quote Billy Dee, one of the founders of the synth-jazz movement, "It just ain't something that can be taught or chipped, man. You just gotta have that *spark*." While old-school music (like pop, country, and rock) are still produced and listened to, they've become more niche interests and have fallen out of favour in the mainstream. Everyone, however, listens to synth-jazz and if you want to make a living as a musician, you had better at least know how to play synth-jazz and get comfortable playing at a club.

Synth-jazz has a variety of subgenres, and everyone has a preference:

- Synth-jazz: The genre that dominates the mainstream. Its unique sound has relatively little in common with the jazz of the 19th century, but the culture and mentality that surround them are remarkably similar (within musical afficionado circles, knowing the classic jazz that "inspired" a synth-jazz piece is worth a lot of cred).
- Ice-jazz: A heavily electronic form of synth-jazz, with dance-focused beats and heavy use of synth-aesthesia (a use of hologram technology that allows you to "see" the music via augmented reality).
- Thrash-jazz: A fusion of synth-jazz and heavy metal, hugely popular in underground youth culture and "not real jazz" to everyone else.

Many cultures and districts have their own take on synth-jazz (similar to how jazz developed into disparate styles in the 19th century) and there's always something fresh to experience at your local synth-jazz club.

Synth-Jazz Clubs

The popularity of synth-jazz, as well as the re-emergence of broader jazz culture to go with it, has led to a wildly popular revival of the classic jazz club, updated for the 2090s. Lounges, bars, meeting places, and much more, these synth-jazz clubs are frequented by people from all walks of life, and they are readily found anywhere in Neo York. There's a synth-jazz club on every block, or at least it feels that way half the time, and nearly everyone you know has a favourite. Synth-jazz clubs are as varied as their clientele, ranging from luxury sky clubs exclusive to the super-wealthy, to dingy back-alley joints that are painfully obvious fronts for the mafia.

It's a generally accepted fact that jazz clubs are the go-to place for conducting business behind closed doors. Even the meanest of them has a VIP section in the back, and the clandestine dealings that go on in them vary by club. However, it's generally a safe bet that whatever is being discussed back there is, at best, only semi-legal.

DARK MARKETS

A popular aphorism in Neo York is that "nothing fun happens 'til the sun goes down". Those in the know use the phrase to refer to the city's dark markets, illicit marketplaces that pop up after dusk and disappear before dawn. Most are focused on dodgy fiscal tokens, fake IDs, illegal weapons, or rare commodities (usually goods from pre-2030).

FASHION

What's old is new again and, a century later, the fashion of the 1920s is all the rage in Neo York, with a healthy dose of the 1980s thrown in for good measure. Fedoras, suits with wide lapels, and button-up shirts (usually using new-fangled repeltech buttons – don't ask, it's complicated) are the in-style for anyone who takes to be taken seriously.

If you're a classy sort, you wear tuxedos and evening gowns when you're out on the town. Even streetwear has adopted the 1920s look, with newsboy caps and suspenders being back in style.

Neon-wear is a popular fashion fad that features bright clothing that makes use of WETnet lights and AR to literally light up the room.

Dark-wear is the favoured style of the elite, where clothing is dyed in the darkest possible colours, using expensive materials designed to absorb light, contrasted with thin WETnet neon threads to create a muted pattern that showcases wealth.

FOOD AND DRINK

Sit-down restaurants are exceptionally rare nowadays, unless you're one of the elite. Even synth-jazz clubs rarely have a full-service menu anymore.

If you want to get food on the go, you're usually hitting up a street cart or food shack. The updated version of the classic food truck or street corner vendor, these food establishments are everywhere, offering all types of food, from popular classics (often matching the local culture of the district you're in) to weird and experimental tech-foods.

Depending on where you are in Neo York, you can find nearly anything. For the discerning foodie, one of the biggest benefits of the megacity is ready access to genuine ethnic food. Gone are the days of Italian-American; now you can just head over to Little Italy and grab some actual Italian food, made in a city that was literally floated over from Italy. An authentic food experience has never been easier to find, if you're willing to wander over to the right district or gamble on a street cart.

Alcohol remains the same as it ever was, and it's readily accessible in Neo York. Classic drinks are still commonplace, and oftentimes the only real difference is the repeltech floating on offer in the fancier establishments (or maybe it's mixed and served by a robot).

TRAVEL

When it comes to getting from A to B, most people in Neo York use a taxi. It's worked for the last two hundred years, why not keep doing it? Owning a personal vehicle is just an expensive time sink. If you get a Neo-Metro pass, it's practically free after all the discounts.

If you want to leave Neo York, there are two ways to go about it: air and sea.

Air is the obvious one. The repeltech airliners are fast, efficient, and perfectly safe.

Sea travel has changed a lot. Ships now float above the waves on repeltech, using towed drift-gens to power them as they travel. The floating ships can navigate the unpredictable currents and weather patterns of the post-2030 seas safely but slowly. Transport ships can move far more cargo than ever, much more than an airliner can, and so remain dominant in the import-export business.

PROBLEMS FACING NEO YORK

There are plenty of problems facing Neo York. Crime, both violent and organised, is out of control. Outside the insulated sky-bound world of the elite, day-to-day prices fluctuate wildly as the economy continues to shift. Corruption is rampant at every level of society. Youth culture is in moral crisis, awash in thrash-jazz and lurid neons. Really, it's easier to list what isn't a problem these days than what is.

The city council likes to tout that Neo York has one of the lowest poverty levels of all the world's megacities, but that hides the fact that most individuals are just barely above the poverty line. While the average person doesn't have to worry about small expenses anymore (food is rarely a concern), larger expenses can crop up unexpectedly, and most aren't prepared for them.

Crime, on the other hand, is rampant. Organised crime has a hand in almost every facet of Neo York society. The police are at best useless and at worst complicit. The average citizen either has to put up with it, bribe a cop or an official to do something, or take justice into their own hands (almost always with disastrous results).

Then there's politics. Politics are thoroughly corrupt in Neo York, and everyone knows it. You can only get into politics if you've got money – enough to bury all your dirty little secrets (everyone has them) – and connections, be they corporate, familial, or criminal.

MEGACORPORATIONS

Megacorporations are mostly a thing of the past. While some megacorps still exist, their power is well past its zenith of the 2050s and 60s, leaving them subservient to the UN, national governments, and Logos. Most people today view megacorps as a necessary evil; they don't like them, but there are plenty of other things more worth worrying about.

Here is a list of the remaining megacorps with a noteworthy presence in Neo York.

GLOBAL OMNITECH CORPORATION

KNOWLEDGE. ADVANCEMENT. PROFIT.

Derisively dubbed "Glomni" by the general public, Global Omnitech Corp is a massive multi-industry corporation.

Originally focused on the tech industry (mostly computer chips, hardware, and accessories), GO Corp (its preferred abbreviation) is headquartered in the floating city of San Francisco. It rose to power via an aggressive series of mergers and acquisitions across a multitude of sectors, including logistics, manufacturing, retail, and robotics, during the economic downturn of the 2030s.

Glomni is the largest producer of repeltech and WETnet devices worldwide, and regularly supplies enormous bulk orders to governments and similarly large organisations. Global Omnitech is responsible for the logistics behind most of Neo York's sea trade, including food imports critical to the megacity's survival.

Even more than other megacorps, Glomni has a very negative public image (thanks in large part to the Corporate Wars), and its CEO Angela Sampson has spent the last decade hyper-focused on improving its PR and marketing in order to ensure GO Corp remains a "GOing" concern (a pun that was a gift to late-night satirists and a sacking offence for the marketing team that came up with it).

- **Headquarters:** SanSan Metropolis
- **CEO:** Angela Sampson
- **Publicly Traded:** Yes
- **Industries:** Logistics, Manufacturing (Technology and Robotics), Retail, Financial Management

HYPERMEDIA PRODUCTIONS

LET'S ALL SMILE TOGETHER

Hypermedia Productions is the world's dominant entertainment megacorp. During the tumultuous 2030s, 40s, and50s, a mysterious venture capital fund continually bought up struggling news networks, media outlets, and entertainment studios.

By the time Hypermedia Productions officially launched, it already had a major share of the news and entertainment media market. Following its launch, an aggressive campaign of anti-competitive practices, including leveraging its controlling stake in telecoms infrastructure to choke competitors, left Hypermedia as the communications giant of the American hemisphere. It relentlessly protected that dominance while expanding into foreign markets until the UN and US government legislated against it in the 2070s.

An early adopter of holo-play technology, Hypermedia is the largest source of entertainment news on the market. The only real failure on its part was missing out on adapting to synth-jazz as the dominant music market (something that its current CEO, former holo-star Aaron Alexander Anderson, is trying to correct).

Nowadays, Hypermedia is careful to play ball with any and all government regulators, but the amount of power and sway it has over public perception is nearly unassailable in most countries where it operates.

- **Headquarters:** Neo York
- **CEO:** Aaron Alexander Anderson
- **Publicly Traded:** Yes
- **Industries:** Mass Media, Communications Infrastructure, PR and Marketing

NOVA-PULSAR SECURITY CORPORATION

SECURING YOUR FUTURE

NPSC is the top security firm on the East Coast of the United States, providing private security to government, corporate, and private interests alike. It primarily hires former police and military personnel, focused on providing top grade protection and security to Neo York citizens.

If you walk into a bank, the guards are likely NPSC employees. If you walk into City Hall, the guards are likely NPSC employees. If you see someone walking down the street in a suit, wearing shades and carrying a gun, it's likely an NPSC employee.

NPSC is also licensed by the UN to manufacture and sell small arms and military equipment, which it doles out liberally to its security officers. Asking whether or not the megacorp has strayed into the realms of being a private military is a good way of making politicians uncomfortable, especially since a number of governments contract NPSC to bolster their intelligence and counter-intelligence agencies.

Rumour has it that NPSC even provides the security for Logos on its private island, and that Logos has scrubbed the identity of the NPSC's owner from the records in order to ensure its own security.

- **Headquarters:** Greater Chicago
- **CEO:** Unknown
- **Publicly Traded:** No
- **Industry:** Private Security, Military Equipment, Private Intelligence

PENDRAGON MEDICAL CONSULTING & RESEARCH

YOUR HEALTH FIRST

Pendragon Medical Consulting & Research is the leading medical research investor and pharmaceutical manufacturer worldwide. It specialises in cutting-edge drug-delivery methods and novel biopharmaceuticals, but there isn't anything in a hospital or medical research lab that you can't buy from PMCR, including syringes, microscopes, cybernetic implants, diagnostic equipment, and ambulances.

PMCR has a major office in Neo York, where it runs clinical trials, performs community outreach, and imports medical supplies. It also owns shares in several of Neo York's hospitals and clinics.

Among megacorps, it even has an almost-positive public opinion rating as PMCR is generally considered relatively benevolent, with some referring to it as "the good one". PMCR operates an extensive charity outreach programme, which has been a consistent part of its corporate ethos (and public messaging) for years, including highly publicised donations of medical equipment and supplies to clinics in poor and marginalised communities. However, profit is profit, and to those who pay attention, PMCR is known as one of the world's most litigious megacorporations, jealously defending its patents and contracts.

- **Headquarters:** Oxford-Sheffield
- **CEO:** Bron F. King
- **Publicly Traded:** Yes
- **Industry:** Pharmaceuticals, Healthcare Services, Diagnostic Equipment

HUDSON CAPITAL

THE MIDAS TOUCH

Hudson Capital is the world's premier finance megacorporation, owning a majority share of several banks, primary import-export brokers, and investment funds across multiple markets, including Neo York. While it touts its connection to small borrowers, savings accounts, and more, Hudson Capital's real power is its status as the company for securely storing, moving, and obscuring the wealth of the hyper-rich.

While the ways in which wealth is invested have changed due to the pervasive influence of Logos, Hudson Capital has managed to stay ahead of the curve. The megacorp, through means both fair and foul, has consistently delivered wealth and profit to its shareholders in spite of the constant changes to the world's economic and financial systems.

Hudson Capital serves as an exchange house for exports and imports, ensuring taxes are paid, forms are filled, and paperwork is filed (for a cut, of course). This keeps them deeply in bed with the Neo Nostra, as well as playing fair with the Yakuza and Triads. Hudson Capital just wants to keep everyone happy and make as much money as possible, and will do whatever it takes to keep the status quo. Whilst nothing has yet been proved, speculation is rampant that Hudson Capital is at the centre of the world's largest money laundering operation; some even suggest that Logos is involved somehow, although this is generally dismissed as a ridiculous conspiracy theory.

Change undermines profit, after all.

- **Headquarters:** Neo York
- **CEO:** Ibrahim al Amin
- **Publicly Traded:** Yes
- **Industry:** Investing, Finances, and Real Estate

HOLT-KAPLAN CLONE & BIOROID SOURCING

ENSURING LIFE

Holt-Kaplan Clone & Bioroid Sourcing is the top "birther" of clones and bioroids in the northern hemisphere, dominating both the lucrative North American and European markets. If you meet a clone or bioroid on the streets of Neo York, there's about a 90% chance it's a Holt-Kaplan.

With a wide variety of models, fulfilling nearly any job suitable for clones and bioroids, Holt-Kaplan has a reputation for top-of-the-line delivery and satisfaction, and a publicly positive working relationship with governmental and independent standards agencies (clone and bioroid manufacture is a highly regulated industry). With human rights legislation protecting clones and bioroids, Holt-Kaplan uses a proprietary educational path to ensure all its clones and bioroids are prepared and offered multiple education options, as well as multiple employment options inside their assigned skill sets. At least, that's what the marketing says.

Holt-Kaplan has recently come under scrutiny after a whistleblower reported on unethical conditions in its production farms, and is currently engaged in expensive damage-limitation activities, including major lobbying efforts to prevent a number of governments passing legislation that would allow them significantly increased oversight over Holt-Kaplan's practices. A number of smaller clone and bioroid providers are quietly funding clone and bioroid advocacy groups to really pile the pressure on Holt-Kaplan, hoping to snatch up part of the megacorp's market share while the proverbial blood is in the water.

- **Headquarters:** Nova Vancouver
- **CEO:** Delian Ophinis
- **Publicly Traded:** No
- **Industry:** Clone and Bioroid Production

EDISELA-YUAN

GETTING YOU THERE

Edisela-Yuan is the world's premier vehicle manufacturer, producing everything from personal hovercars to the hyperfreighters that sail 2093's turbulent oceans. It was the first to utilise repeltech in vehicles, and has made significant investment into remaining at the cutting edge of vehicle design.

Anywhere you go, you'll see EdY-branded vehicles, from its ubiquitous Jumper (a one-person commuter vehicle) to its luxurious Commadore, a multi-passenger, bulletproof, "unhackable" hovercar marketed to VIPs and royalty. EdY owns a significant portion of the market, often undercutting everyone else in order to monopolise vehicle supply to taxi fleets, logistics companies, and others.

Although not as dominant as in transport, Edisela-Yuan is also a major manufacturer of heavy industry equipment. Recently, the megacorp has also been snapping up government contracts to supply military vehicles, although all parties involved have an interest in keeping this quiet; EdY has put a lot of effort into distancing itself from military production since the Corporate Wars.

- **Headquarters:** Hong Kong
- **CEO:** Takahashi Akane
- **Publicly Traded:** Yes
- **Industry:** Repeltech Vehicles, Heavy Industry Equipment, Military Vehicles

TOP FIVE BEST-SELLING EDISELA-YUANS

1. *Jumper*, a single person commuter vehicle
2. *Hierarch*, a luxury family vehicle
3. *Azores*, a large-scale personal cargo vehicle
4. *Janus*, a sports-coupé
5. *Opal*, a low-cost family vehicle

OUTER SPACE

The UN currently operates two active space stations, both serving as tourist destinations, research hubs, and a variety of other roles. Getting to the stations is relatively affordable, and it's fairly common for families or school groups to visit, though due to the stations' limited resources and size, you need to book pretty far in advance.

The older of the two, the *Gallant*, operates between Earth and the Moon, serving as a logistics hub for the UN's lunar research stations. The lunar stations themselves are off-limits to the public, but the Gallant does operate daily lunar surface tours for tourists (although they are quite expensive).

Likewise, the *Indomitable* fulfils a similar role between Earth and Mars. Human habitation is less continuous on Mars, but there are a handful of permanent research bases there.

One benefit of the stations is the lack of crime there. While crime does happen in space, structured organised crime is almost non-existent. What does exist generally falls within the realm of small-scale smuggling or petty theft.

However, the rich and powerful like to frequent the stations for a spot of orbital dining and zero-gravity golf. As such, plenty of underhanded and under-the-table deals are made there, and you might find yourself engaged in a little white-collar crime if you were to fall in with the wrong (or right) crowd.

TIPS FOR PORTRAYING NEO YORK

It's always raining in Neo York. Sunshine is rare to unheard of at street level. If you want to catch some rays, the only real way to do it is to visit the penthouse suites of Glass Park (of course the rich get to see the sun). The rain reflects the neon, but never washes away the ever-present grime and filth of the megacity's streets. On good days it's a drizzle, on most it's a downpour.

All vehicles fly. Just go with it. Take a normal vehicle, give it repeltech, and now it's flying. Be it taxis, delivery trucks, sports cars, or limos. You don't have to set foot in the alleys if you don't want to (assuming you can afford cab fare, that is).

Neon signs dot everything, and repeltech creates a soft glow effect around any technology that uses it.

Crime is everywhere. Music is everywhere. Food is everywhere. You can always find a synth-jazz club, a holo-play, or some gangsters hanging out. Life is in your face, both in the real world and AR.

NEO YORK AS A STAND-IN

The idea of Neo York is to present the idea of a near-future city that we're familiar with from pop culture and update it with a noir theme and narrative impact. You could just as easily apply the tips here and broader principles of the setting to any 2090s city of your choosing.

The world is still as large as it ever was, and great stories can (and should!) be generated outside of Neo York.

PLAYING THE GAME

At its core, *Crescendo of Violence* uses a very simple mechanic: the **Test**.

When a player wishes to have their character do something or act in a way that carries risk or narrative impact, the player and GM determine what **Path** the character will take to achieve it. There are eight paths:

- The **CAUTIOUS** path is where the PC carefully focuses on the details, taking their time to overcome the obstacle. This can be taking steady aim in combat, picking a lock slowly and methodically, or carefully writing a speech to get a crowd to reach an emotional high.
- The **CLEVER** path invokes innovation, out-of-the-box thinking, and intelligent use of the PC's surroundings to overcome the obstacle.
- The **DRAMATIC** path attempts to draw attention and focus; it means the PC being loud, doing something impossible to ignore, and making an impression.
- The **EMPATHETIC** path is about understanding, sharing a connection, and attempting to reach a middle ground in order to accomplish an action. It means teamwork, understanding, and support.
- The **FAST** path leans on speed, dexterity, and agility to get the job done. Attempting to avoid an attack, running as fast as possible, and trying to get them before they get you are all part of the FAST path.
- The **RESOLUTE** path is one of steadfastness, resistance, and overcoming the obstacle through sheer force of will.
- The **SNEAKY** path involves misdirection, misleading, and being as subtle as possible to accomplish a task. It can be lying, stealing, shadowing, or feinting.
- The **VIOLENT** path involves using force, strength, and intimidation to remove the obstacle.

Each PC has a rating for each path from 1 to 5. Higher ratings mean a character is more adept at the skills that are part of that path. When your PC attempts to overcome an obstacle, tell the GM what path they'll be using (they'll either agree or propose a more fitting alternative). If the GM agrees, you make a test.

There are two types of test: **Basic Tests** and **Opposed Tests**.

BASIC TESTS

Basic tests are simple to resolve and are used when a PC is trying to overcome a static obstacle.

To make a basic test, roll a number of d10s equal to your PC's rating for the appropriate path. Keep the highest result rolled and compare it to the test's **Difficulty** (rated from 1-10). If the result equals or exceeds the Difficulty, your PC is successful.

A result of "10" on the dice is always successful. A result of "1" is **not** an automatic failure (although a Difficulty 1 test is impossible to fail).

Example: Alan is attempting to have his character leap from a taxi to a city bus in an effort to chase down an escaping gangster. He proposes that this test relies on the **FAST** *path, and the GM agrees.*

The GM thinks about it for a moment and asks themselves: "On a scale of 1–10, how hard is this?" They settle on a 7. It's risky, challenging, and dramatic, but not impossible to accomplish with some effort and a little luck.

Alan's character has **FAST 3***, so he rolls 3d10. He gets a 1, a 5, and a 7. He keeps the 7 as the highest result, and compares it to the Difficulty set by the GM. 7 equals or exceeds the Difficulty of 7, so Alan's character successfully leaps from the taxi to the bus!*

SOME USEFUL DEFINITIONS

- **Path:** The approach and method by which a PC solves a problem or overcomes an obstacle.
- **Test:** When a player rolls dice to overcome an obstacle. Tests are how most of the drama unfolds.
- **Difficulty:** How hard a test is, on a scale from 1 (easy) to 10 (very hard).

SETTING DIFFICULTY

A useful habit for GMs to get into when setting the Difficulty for a test is to ask yourself the question: "How hard is this, on a scale of 1–10?" and then just make the answer the Difficulty.

This is a deliberate design choice to make it easy for the GM to make calls on the fly. The 1–10 scale is relatively fluid, but it gives the group a clear scale to communicate with.

Don't worry too much about the fine detail or having perfect consistency. Remember, the aim of *Crescendo of Violence* is to capture a cinematic feel; how hard something is should be based on the needs of the narrative, plot, and story we're telling. If Difficulty wiggles or shifts around, that's OK. The GM should try to be as consistent and fair as possible, but also prioritise the feel of the moment and keep the story moving.

If you want a basis to calibrate by, here's a guide:

1 Impossible to fail.
2 Easy. Only bad luck or severe lack of focus could make you fail here.
3 Requires a little bit of effort or focus.
4 Not hard (especially with practice), but requires attention.
5 Takes effort and focus.
6 There's a real risk of failure, but still doable.
7 Pretty challenging, even if trained.
8 Consistent practice and effort are needed.
9 Some luck, lots of experience, and practice are needed. It's very hard.
10 Very difficult, requires either a lot of luck or a lot of skill.

OPPOSED TESTS

An opposed test takes place when an active force is working against the PC making the test. To make an opposed test, both sides roll their chosen path, and the side with the higher result is the winner, achieving their aims over the loser. If there is a tie, default to the second-highest die result and that party wins the test (continue in this manner until a winner is determined).

Example: Alan's character is grappling with a hitman on the roof of a skyhouse. As they trade blows and fight back and forth, they're rolling opposed tests. As Alan's character attempts to strike the hitman, he rolls **VIOLENT**. *The GM has the killer roll* **FAST** *to dodge out of the way.*

Alan's character has **VIOLENT 4**, *and rolls a 2, 3, 5, and 8. The hitman has* **FAST 3**, *and rolls a 4, 6, and 7. Because Alan's character's 8 is higher than the hitman's 7, he strikes the hitman and inflicts damage (covered on page 65).*

BONUSES AND PENALTIES

Various rules (equipment, action tokens, etc.) grant PCs bonuses for making tests. These bonuses are written as "+Xd10", which indicates how many bonus d10s they add to appropriate tests. Conversely, penalties are written as "-Xd10", which indicates how many dice are removed from a roll. These modifiers are always used before rolling a test.

You never add or subtract from the dice result, you only change the number of dice you roll.

No matter how many bonuses or penalties you get, you can never roll more than 10d10 and never less than 1d10. That's just how it works.

Otherwise, all bonuses and penalties stack.

Example: Alan's character has taken some time to prepare for their infiltration into the underwater Empire State Museum.

This uses the ***SNEAKY*** *path, in which Alan's character has a rating of 3. The GM decides that the preparation and specialised equipment Alan's character has obtained grants a +2d10 bonus, so Alan rolls the test with 5d10, significantly improving his odds of success.*

CONSEQUENCES OF FAILURE

So what happens when you fail a test?

At the basic level, your PC simply fails to accomplish their task. This is most common in situations where you are making the test to determine a binary outcome, such as combat: either you hit the mook or you don't. This is the easiest outcome for a GM to adjudicate.

Alternatively, the GM can propose a "partial success". Your PC succeeds at their goal, but it costs them. You get the outcome you wanted, but with some sort of setback or complication mixed in. This is often the most interesting way to adjudicate an outcome, but it can take time and effort to do on the fly, so should be done judiciously. You don't want to slow the game down by haggling over how the dice landed.

Either approach is acceptable, and both should be used in a mix to help create a solid narrative flow to the story without slowing the pace of play.

AID AND SUPPORTING TESTS

It's very likely that, at some point, a player will want their character to aid or support a friend during a test, providing some advantage to them. To do so, the aiding character must meet the following two conditions:

- First, the supporting character must be in the same scene (narratively, but not necessarily physically). Support can be given via the WETnet, physical aid, or moral encouragement, but the supporting character needs to be present in some way to deliver the aid. The GM should use their best judgement when determining what counts as being in the same scene.
- Second, the supporting character must have a rating of at least 2 in the path being used for the test. Having an unskilled helper is often worse than doing it by yourself.

If both these conditions are met, the supporting character chooses one of the following benefits:

- The acting character gains +1d10 on their test.
- The acting character may reroll a single 1 on their test.
- The acting character may cancel one -1d10 penalty.

A player character may receive aid from multiple allies, but may only receive each possible benefit once per test. This means that a maximum of three characters can support on a given test.

ACTIONS

Any time a character makes a test, they are performing an **Action**. Not everything a character does needs to be an action; there's no need to interrupt the flow of the narrative to make a test unless what the character is attempting is either risky or dramatic. Walking down a monorail train looking for a seat doesn't require an action. Pushing down the crowded aisle of a monorail chain in hot pursuit of a suspect before you lose the trail *does*.

Most of the time, the order in which actions take place doesn't matter, players simply make their tests as they come up. Sometimes one player will end up taking a sequence of multiple actions in a row, resolving them one after the other. This is absolutely fine; the aim here is to keep the story flowing, so if you don't need to worry about action order, don't get bogged down in it.

However, sometimes the order actions take place in does matter. When that happens, it's time to use the Spotlight mechanic.

THE SPOTLIGHT

When the order of actions matters, the acting character has the Spotlight. The character with the spotlight is the one who takes actions and resolves tests. The Spotlight represents the fact that they are the current focus of the narrative.

After the character with the spotlight has resolved their action or finished their bit of the narrative, the spotlight moves to whoever is narratively appropriate or hasn't acted yet. Players should feel free to speak up and say what they'd like to do. Pass the spotlight to whoever has an idea, and continue moving it from there.

Since this system might be unusual for players used to other RPGs, here is some advice for determining who should have spotlight:

- If someone is in danger or under threat, they get the spotlight.
- If someone is doing something aggressive, they get the spotlight.
- If someone takes the lead, speaks for the group, or takes charge, they get the spotlight.
- When someone hasn't done anything in a while, they get the spotlight, so that they can tell the table what they've been up to.
- When someone does anything that is risky or dramatic, they get the spotlight.

The spotlight can also swing to the GM's non-player characters as is narratively appropriate.

ACTION TOKENS

Each player has three **Action Tokens** – one red, one yellow, and one green – that represent what you can do and how well you can do it. You must spend all of your action tokens before you gain any back (unless another rule allows you to bypass this). After you spend all of your action tokens, you immediately gain all three back (unless another rule, such as death, overrides this). You should always have between one and three action tokens at your disposal.

You must spend an action token whenever you take an action and roll dice, or if another rule tells you to.

You also lose action tokens as a result of taking damage (page 65).

- Spending your **green** action token means that you have good luck, fortune, and an advantage on this test. You gain +2d10 to this test.
- Spending your **yellow** action token means that your luck has balanced out. There are no bonuses or penalties on this test.
- Spending your **red** action token means that you are operating at a disadvantage. You have -2d10 on this test.

You always have at least one action token, so you always have one to spend. If you don't have an action token for any reason, take back all three.

FUN AND FAILURE

It can be tempting to game the system by using your red action token on an action where there's no consequence for failure. Don't do this. Actions should be *dramatic*, and as such, if you try to blow your red token on a wasted action, the GM will likely put a stop to it (and they should). Instead, embrace the fun of dramatic failure. Let the dice fall where they may and work with the GM to set up the next part of the story based on the roll not going your way.

When you spend an action token, you should narrate what it represents in the scene. When you spend your green action token, why are you at an advantage? Is it just a lucky break, or was it careful planning on your part?

Describe how you slip in slick rain, or how you catch the glint of the enemy's firearm right before they fire as you dive to cover. The tokens are there to help prompt those bits of the story for you. They represent a non-random, pre-planned narrative impact that you get to spend as the player.

Sometimes, the narrative will lead into the token used in a very natural way. If, for example, you're taking a long shot down a narrow alleyway at a moving target in the pouring rain, spending a red action token makes a lot of sense. Pay attention to what's going on in the scene and see if you can tie it into the action token you choose to spend.

Other times, however, you'll need to improvise details to explain why a test is or isn't going your way. This is a good thing! In fact, it's the driving reason behind their design, giving you as a player a way to add little touches to the narrative. Just be careful not to take away agency from other characters.

For example, "My opponent trips over a loose stone and falls flat on their face" is too much, but "My opponent stumbles briefly on a loose stone, giving me an unexpected opening" is spot on. The fine line to walk is that you can't dictate what other characters do, but you can have something happen to them that gives you a momentary dramatic advantage. With practice, it'll become natural.

GAME MASTER ACTIONS

NPCs usually don't take actions. They're the supporting cast, and even when they have the spotlight, what they do should involve the players' characters in some way, prompting an opposed test or setting them up to achieve their goal if the PCs don't interfere before the spotlight swings back around to them.

This means that the GM doesn't have action tokens. When an NPC prompts an opposed test, the player involved spends one of their action tokens to determine how fate intervenes. Only one action token should be spent per test.

TOKENLESS TESTS

Sometimes the GM might feel some tests are worth rolling but action tokens aren't appropriate. In this case, they can simply declare a test to be tokenless and have the player roll without spending an action token (functionally giving them a free bonus yellow action token for the test). This rule should be used sparingly, as the action token economy is core to the game.

COMBAT

When guns start blazing and fists start flying, it's time for combat. When a scene moves into characters trying to lay the hurt on one another, there are a few extra rules involved, which are covered in this section.

In combat, all actions are opposed tests and, generally, **VIOLENT** and **FAST** will be the most common paths (for attacking and evading, respectively), but the GM should reward creativity when other options are presented.

ATTACKING AND EVADING

When you wish to attack someone as an action, it is always an opposed test. The most common way this plays out is that the character making the attack rolls their VIOLENT and the character trying to evade out of the way rolls their FAST. However, this is not a hard and fast rule. If it's more appropriate to use a different path to either attack or evade, go with it!

Example: Alan's character is being hunted by an elite Yakuza assassin. After an exhausting chase through the streets, the two have ended up in a brawl on the docks. Alan's character uses the terrain to their advantage, positioning themselves so that if the assassin goes all out, they'll likely take a tumble off the docks and fall in the drink. The GM decides that because this defence relies on situational awareness and careful positioning rather than reflexes, Alan's character uses their CLEVER rather than FAST to evade the assassin's attack.

NO INITIATIVE?

There is no initiative system in *Crescendo of Violence*. The spotlight is intended to be passed around flexibly rather than in a fixed order. Instead, the Spotlight moves to whoever is most appropriate after the character with it performs an action (unless that character spends Momentum to keep taking actions). The key is to keep the focus of the story moving. And remember to pass the spotlight to the GM – the game is more interesting if the bad guys get to do stuff too!

RANGE

To make an attack, you need to have the target in Range. There are four ranges in the game, and the description of your weapon (page 117) will tell you what its range is. Usually the range will make sense, but if in doubt, it's the GM's call.

- **Melee Range** means that you can reach out and touch it, or get to it in a few steps. Someone in the same small apartment room or hallway is likely in melee range.
- **Close Range** means someone is further than melee range, but within 100m or so. It takes one action to cover this distance, bringing something from close to melee range. Handguns, pistols, and similar weapons all work at close range.
- **Long Range** means someone is within eyesight but outside of close range, anywhere from 100m to 1000m. It takes two to four actions to bring someone from long to melee range (the GM decides). Rifles and other long arms work at long range.
- **Extremely Long Range** is anything further away than 1000m. It takes at least five actions to bring someone from extremely long to melee range (the GM decides).

COVER

In combat, you can use your action to Take Cover. Alternatively, you can take cover *at the end of an action* by spending a Reserve (of any value). While you are in cover, you gain +1d10 to tests made to evade or resist damage. This means you can take a normal action (such as attack) and then spend a Reserve to immediately take cover, protecting yourself against any retaliatory attacks.

However, you may not make an attack while in cover.

NO ATTACKS IN COVER?

While it's not very cinematic to say you can't attack while in cover, for mechanical reasons, the game dictates that you can't. The intent is to force players to make decisions regarding their resources, specifically their Reserves and Momentum, when engaged in combat.

DAMAGE AND HARM

When you get hit in combat, the attacker rolls their weapon's **Damage** against you (the number of d10s listed in the weapon's description). When rolling damage, if the highest number rolled exceeds your **RESOLUTE** path rating, you suffer one of the following effects (we often call these **Harm** as a shorthand):

- Lose one Momentum
- Lose your green or yellow action token (if you have both, you must lose your green action token first).
- You are knocked out of the narrative until this combat is resolved or someone spends a green action token and an action (no test needed) to bring you back into it.

As the player suffering harm, you get to decide which effect you suffer. If you can't suffer the negatives of an effect, you can't select it.

Damage works a little differently for non-player characters. Don't roll damage against an NPC. Instead, when an NPC is hit in combat, lose one from their harm rating and are knocked out when their harm is down to zero.

PCS CAN'T DIE?

It's a trope in heroic bloodshed that the characters survive against all odds until the very end. Characters are only vulnerable to death during Act III of a session, which is discussed in more detail on page 80.

MOMENTUM

Characters gain **Momentum** by succeeding on tests. There are three ways to gain Momentum:

- Whenever a character rolls a 10, they gain one Momentum for each 10 rolled.
- You can spend Reserves to gain Momentum.
- You can use the Prepare Downtime action (page 69) to gain Momentum.

A character can never have more than five Momentum at once.

When a character gains Momentum, the player simply takes a token and places it in front of them. During the game, characters can spend Momentum for special effects:

- **Keep It Up:** Spend one Momentum to take an action immediately after resolving another action. They can continue to buy actions in a chain for as long as they have Momentum to spend.
- **Seize The Spotlight:** Spend one Momentum to take the spotlight from one of the GM's characters. Momentum cannot be used to take the spotlight from a PC (meaning the GM cannot spend Momentum in this way).
- **No You Don't:** Spend two Momentum to negate one of the GM's Momentum spends.
- **Catch A Break:** Spend one Momentum to recover an action token. Each player can only do this once per session.
- Various talents let you spend Momentum for specific effects.

The GM starts each session with Momentum equal to the number of PCs, and gains one Momentum (up to five) whenever a PC spends Momentum.

WHAT IS MOMENTUM?

Momentum is designed to give the story's pacing a more cinematic flow, allowing the protagonists to careen from event to event, sometimes to their detriment.

Momentum is what makes brings life to the gun-fu ballet feel of the game. Combined with action tokens, it's what makes the whole thing tick.

RESERVES

Each character has Reserves that represent their inner strength, willpower, and more. Reserves all have a value from 1 to 10. Most characters have five Reserves. You gain Reserves during the Intro of each game session. This is covered on page 78.

You can spend your character's Reserves during play to change how things play out in the narrative. You can spend reserves in the following ways:

- **Sure Gamble**: Before you roll a test, you can spend a Reserve to simply take the Reserve's value as the test result.
- **Second Wind**: If you spend a Reserve with a value of 5–8, you recover a yellow action token. If you spend a Reserve with a value of 9–10, you recover a green action token.
- **Gain Momentum**: If you spend two Reserves that total 10 or less, gain one Momentum.
- **Take Cover**: If you spend a Reserve of any value at the end of a combat action, take cover. While you are in cover, you gain +1d10 to tests made to evade or resist damage. You cannot attack while in cover.
- Various professions, talents, equipment, etc. let you spend Reserves for specific effects.

You can use Reserves at any time, as long as it makes sense (for example, replacing a test result when you aren't rolling dice isn't really relevant, but regaining an action token when you're taking damage is).

DOWNTIME ACTIONS

When things aren't going crazy or blowing up, the PCs are able to take Downtime Actions. These quiet moments allow you to relax, advance, or gain some benefit for down the road. They represent the things people do when they're not out trying to make a living on the mean neon streets of Neo York.

This section covers a list of downtime actions you can take. You can only take a downtime action when you have narrative downtime away from the session's main job or mission in order to accomplish them.

If a downtime action has one or more acts listed (see "Story Structure" on page 77), you can only undertake that downtime action during that act. Each player can only take a maximum of two downtime actions per session, and they cannot take more than one during the same act.

DOWNTIME ACTIONS BY ACT

Intro	Act I	Act II	Act III	Outro
Connect	Earn	Earn		Connect
Earn	Shop	Prepare		Make a Friend
Practice		Shop		Make Peace
Prepare				Practice
Relax				Relax
Shop				Shop
Vice				Vice

CONNECT *INTRO, OUTRO*

You hang out with an ally or contact (page 140), ensuring that your bond remains healthy. What do you do to build this bond and keep them in your corner? Why have you chosen to spend time with this ally or contact now?

Remove one Distrust from that ally or contact. You may remove two Distrust if you spend two Reserves during this downtime action.

EARN *INTRO, ACT I, ACT II*

You go to work, keeping yourself employed. This can be at your day job, a special freelance gig, or whatever you and the GM agree is suitable. What is it? Why do you do this job?

Your first Wealth test this session is made with +1d10. If you spend a Reserve, make your first Wealth test with +2d10 instead.

MAKE A FRIEND *OUTRO*

You make a friend with one of the NPCs you met this session. How did you befriend them and why?

Gain a new contact with Loyalty 2 and Resources 2. If you spend two Reserves, you can increase their Loyalty or Resources to 3.

MAKE PEACE *OUTRO*

You smooth the ruffled feathers of those who've been impacted by your escapades. How do you make peace with your potential enemies?

Remove 1 Heat from a character or organisation that has Heat with you. You can remove 2 Heat if you spend two Reserves during this downtime action.

PRACTICE *INTRO, OUTRO*

You practice something, be it a skill, a specific task or action, or anything else you can get familiar with in such a way. What do you practice? Why are you practicing it?

Immediately gain 1 experience point.

PREPARE *INTRO, ACT II*

You prepare for a current or future job. This can be things like doing research, checking your gear, or talking to a buddy. What are you preparing for? How do you go about it?

You gain one of the following benefits:

- Immediately gain one Reserve
- Immediately gain 2 Momentum
- Immediately utilise an ally or contact (this doesn't count towards the once per session limit).

RELAX *INTRO, OUTRO*

You take a minute to break and recover yourself. How do you choose to relax? How does this tell us who you are?

Immediately gain 1 experience point.

SHOP *INTRO, ACT I, ACT II, OUTRO*

You go out shopping for something. New clothes, a new weapon, new implants, whatever you fancy. What is it? Why do you want or need it?

This action is primarily designed to limit how much the purchasing system in the game can be used, and the GM should feel comfortable adjusting how this downtime action works (either opening it up, or tightening it up).

You may immediately make a Wealth check to buy something. This is the primary way to acquire new gear.

VICE *INTRO, OUTRO*

You indulge in your chosen vice. Strong drink, drugs, sex – whatever your vice is, you're out there getting as much of it as you can right now.

Immediately gain 1 experience point and 3 Heat with an appropriate character or organisation.

THREE WAYS TO GAIN BONUS EXPERIENCE POINTS?

Yup! Putting a portion of the player's experience point gain in their own hands allows them to control their destiny.

However, if all they do is gain experience points, they will eventually be brought low by their enemies as they upset all their Contacts, their Heat gets too high, and they run out of luck.

ADVANCEMENT AND EXPERIENCE

At the end of each session, each character will get 0 or 3 **Experience Points**. Characters might acquire bonus experience points from downtime actions (page 68). Experience Points can be used to:

ACQUIRE NEW TALENTS

It costs 5 experience points to buy a new talent and 3 to increase your rank in a talent you already have. **You may never have more than three ranks in a talent.**

Talents are listed on page 106.

INCREASE PATH RATING

The cost to increase a path rating depends on your current rating on that path according to the table on the next page.

You can only increase your path rating by one at a time; you cannot spend 20 experience points to increase a path rating from 3 to 5, you must spend 16 to increase it to 4 first, and then another 20 to increase it to 5.

INCREASE CRED RATING

The cost to increase a Cred rating depends on your current Cred rating according to the table on the next page.

You can only increase your Cred rating by 1d10 at a time.

INCREASE CONTACT AND ALLY ATTRIBUTES

The cost to increase the attribute of a contact or ally depends on their current attribute according to the table on the next page. A contact or ally's attributes can only be raised once per session, and any number of players can contribute towards the experience point cost, sharing it out between them. The Contact must have been utilised this session.

You can only increase an attribute by one at a time. Resources can never be increased above 5, and if a contact's Loyalty is raised to 6, they immediately become an ally.

The rules for contacts and allies are listed on page 140.

ADVANCEMENT TABLES

ACQUIRE NEW TALENTS	
Talent	**Experience Points to Buy**
New Talent	5
Talent Rank 2	3
Talent Rank 3	3

INCREASE PATH RATINGS	
New Path Rating	**Experience Points to Buy**
2	8
3	12
4	16
5	20

INCREASE CRED RATING	
New Path Rating	**Experience Points to Buy**
2d10	10
3d10	15
4d10	20
5d10	25

INCREASE CONTACT ATTRIBUTES	
New Attribute	**Experience Points to Buy**
2	4
3	6
4	8
5	10
6	12
7	14
8	16
9	18

HEAT

When you cause trouble in Neo York, you gain Heat from the big dogs at the top of this neon junkyard. At the end of every session, if a PC's actions draws the attention of a major player in the city (a crime boss, influential socialite, powerful politician, etc.), the group gains 1 **Heat** from that character or organisation. If the GM feels that the session's impact was high enough, they might decide to apply some additional Heat! Too much Heat is bad news for you.

The GM tracks Heat for each powerful figure and organisation separately, and can spend it to have them interrupt, mess with, or derail your plans. Those in power don't like being challenged.

The GM can spend Heat during either of the Intro or Outro acts. If spent in the Intro, the penalty applies for this session; if spent during the Outro, it applies for the following session. It's only applied to one PC (the one that the character or organisation feels is the biggest threat or most infuriating), unless the description in the table below states otherwise.

HEAT	EFFECT
1	They make life hard for you this session. All PCs take -1d10 to your Cred rating as work dries up due to being blacklisted. This lasts for one session.
1	They oppose a particular task you're undertaking, throwing up red tape, paperwork, or more... criminal obstacles to get in your way. The first green action token you spend counts as a yellow and the first yellow action token you spend counts as a red.
2	They actively work to undermine you. The GM adds a group of their mooks, grunts, or thugs to a scene at a dramatic moment.
2	They go after your livelihood hard. All PCs take -2d10 to your Cred rating as you are sent home from work and no one returns your calls. This lasts for one session.
3	They go after your friends and family. The next time any PC utilises an ally or contact, they immediately take 3 Distrust.
3	They go after your life, hard. They send an elite enemy to take you on.
4	They're done. It's getting real. They send three mooks, grunts, and thugs along with two elite enemies to put an end to you once and for all.

When spending Heat, it's important that the GM narrates what happens and why, giving the PCs a chance to respond. Heat is reflective of how the actions of the PCs have impacted the city and those around them. Heat can come from something small (a bouncer you tangled with at the local synth-jazz club) or big (Global Omnitech's product launch was severely disrupted when you offed their chief engineer in a botched job for the Venturi family).

Remember, Heat represents delayed consequences for player actions. It's OK to hold on to it, make notes, and bring it back a few sessions later as you tie story threads together.

Here's a quick list of organisations that PCs can have Heat with in Neo York. Feel free to add your own as needed for your game.

- **Crime**
  - The Barrichello Crime Family
  - The Iannelli Crime Family
  - The Oldani Crime Family
  - The Petralia Crime Family
  - The Venturi Crime Family
  - The Yakuza
  - The Triads
  - The Russian Mafia
  - The Cartels
- **Neo York**
  - The Neo York Police Department
  - City Hall
  - The Mayor
  - District Managers
- **Locals**
  - Union Bosses
  - Port Authorities
  - Local Bouncers and Synth-Jazz Clubs
  - Famous Holo-Stars and Synth-Jazz Players
- **Megacorps**
  - Global Omnitech Corporation
  - Hypermedia Productions
  - Edisela-Yuan
  - Nova-Pulsar Security Corporation
  - Hudson Capital
  - Pendragon Medical Consulting & Research
  - Holt-Kaplan Clone & Bioroid Sourcing

NO HEAT FROM LOGOS?

Logos is an AI, primarily concerned with the global economy, financial institutions, and national governments. The PCs will probably never rate Logos's attention or time. But if they do...

...that's a big problem.

STORY STRUCTURE

The design of *Crescendo of Violence* is built on the idea that, each time you sit down to play, the game follows a particular story structure. Each session consists of five "acts":

- **Intro:** During the Intro the GM recaps what happened in the previous session and lays out the general stakes for the coming one. The purpose of the Intro is to get everyone on the same page and give some time for them to settle in to play. The Intro is also the time for doing any set-up for the session, such as generating each PC's Reserves.
- **Act I:** This is the backbone of the session. Starting with the inciting incident, Act I comprises the PCs tackling challenges and progressing through the narrative that the GM has prepared for the session. The PCs may be working together or individually, but each should get their chance to contribute towards moving the story forward and have their moment in the spotlight.
- **Act II:** The session moves into Act II once the PCs have worked through the challenges presented in Act I. With the final showdown in sight, the PCs each get a moment to themselves to reflect on how the story has affected them and prepare to confront the session's big bad.
- **Act III:** The big finale. This is where the story comes to a head and the villain is confronted, usually meaning that a big, climactic fight occurs. Act III is where the GM gets to kick down doors, let the bullets fly, and have bodies hit the floor.
- **Outro:** After the climax, the session winds down and wraps up. The Outro is where players get to take stock of what's happened during the session, see the consequences of their actions, and gain Heat. It's also an opportunity for the GM to ask the players how the session went, and for everyone to think about what they'd like to see next time.

The purpose of splitting a session up into discrete acts in this way is to make the game easier for the GM to plan and run. With this structure in place, certain rules and beats can be attached to the appropriate act, streamlining the flow of play and making things easier to keep track of.

INTRO – THE SET-UP

During the Intro, the GM sets up the story, introducing the players to the stakes and objectives for the session. It's a chance to get everyone ready and go through the set-up procedure for the session.

The Intro is the place to recap what happened last time and get the PCs into place for the session's inciting incident, such as receiving a job, getting swept up in sudden action, or anything else that gets the story moving.

Before moving on to Act I, there are three things that need to happen during the Intro:

GENERATE RESERVES

Each player and the GM individually roll 5d10 to generate their Reserves. Note down the results of your roll in the "Databank" section of your character sheet; these are your Reserves for the session.

Example: Alan rolls 5d10 and gets 1, 4, 5, 7, and 9 for his Reserves. He writes each of those numbers down on his character sheet.

THREE QUESTIONS

Going around the table, each player answers three questions to let everyone know what their character has been up to. The GM may want to use these answers to inform the story, weaving them into the upcoming session, or they may just provide texture to the PCs and help get players into character.

The three questions are:

- Who is your character and what have they been up to since we last saw them?
- Who are your character's key associates right now?
- How did your character end up here, ready (or not) for the session?

SPEND HEAT

If the GM chooses, they can spend some of the **Heat** that your group has accrued (page 74). Heat represents the attention your activities have drawn, and the GM spending it means that something is coming back to bite you.

ACT I – THE MAIN PLOT

When the inciting incident occurs, the session moves into Act I. With the stakes set for the session, this is where the PCs work together to tackle the problem they've been presented with, whatever that may be, and progress through the narrative the GM has prepared.

Investigation, problem-solving, and fights with hired thugs all occur here. Act I should comprise of a good mix of action, slow, social, and other forms of scene to suit your group's taste. This act is the backbone of your session, and will probably take up the most time. Don't feel the need to rush through it to get to the finale; let it progress at a pace that best suits your group as a whole.

There are no special rules during Act I, this is where the narrative takes centre stage. As a group, work together to frame the story, elucidating everyone to what's going on and how you are accomplishing it, and make sure that each PC has a role to play and a time to shine.

ACT II – QUIET BEFORE THE STORM

Act II represents an in-between time, a moment of relative quiet where each PC gets a chance to take stock. Give each player a turn to narrate how their character is feeling, letting them reflect on how they got there and tell us what they're doing to unwind, get ready, or prepare themselves before the big showdown with the session's villain.

Narratively, Act II can take many forms. Sometimes, it might be nothing more than an elevator right to the top floor of a skyscraper to a mob boss's penthouse, the PCs all quietly sharing the time in silence, thinking in their own heads. Other times, it might be each PC spending the evening before they raid the hideout they discovered on the docks, perhaps one enjoying a lonely drink at their favourite synth-jazz club, hearing the house band play for what might be the last time.

Here are some things to consider when narrating how your character spends their Act II:

- How is your character showing who they are in this scene? Try making it dramatic, personal, and evocative.
- How does this impact your character's friends and those around them?
- What is your character concerned about or learning from this?

If your PC has three or fewer Reserves at the end of Act II, you may roll 1d10 and take the result as an additional Reserve. The GM may not gain an extra Reserve in this way.

ACT III – THE BIG FINALE

Act III consists of the session's climactic encounter. Usually, this means a big gunfight in true heroic bloodshed fashion, but not necessarily. The final showdown can be social, investigative, or any other form of encounter that befits the story the GM is telling.

CHARACTER DEATH

There is a special rule in place during Act III to up the stakes for the climax: **PCs can die**. During Act III, when a PC would normally be knocked out of the narrative (because they only have a red action token and no Momentum), they die instead. Character death in Act III can only be prevented if someone *immediately* spends a green action token to bring them back into the fight (however, no action is required).

As such, if you want everyone to come out alive, be careful with how you spend your green action tokens when the Act-III bullets start flying.

OUTRO – THE EPILOGUE

With the session's villain defeated and the story wrapped up, it's time for the PCs to go their separate ways again. Like Act II, the Outro consists of each player narrating a small scene where their characters reflect on how the events of the session have affected them and where they go next. Think of it like giving your character a small, personal epilogue.

Once the Outro is over, the GM decides how much Heat the PCs have gained and each player who participated in the Outro gains **3 experience points**.

Even if your character died during Act III, you can narrate how their death affects the people they were close to and gain the experience points to use on your next character.

A MEANINGFUL DEATH

Character death in *Crescendo of Violence* should never feel cheap or meaningless.

When a character dies, let the player have a moment to really make it count. Let them go out in a blaze of glory or let the player really drive home the tragic sequence of events that led to this moment.

As the GM, do what you can to make character deaths count. You could swing the spotlight to a close friend to make a play for swift and brutal revenge, or even give the dying character one last action to take their killer with them.

Try to make death a dramatic high point; remember that in heroic bloodshed, the heroes don't go down easy.

EXAMPLE SESSION: SIBLING RIVALRY

To bring it all together, here's an overview of an example session using the five-act structure. Alan, the GM, is taking his players, Filip and Jasmine, through a story he's called "Sibling Rivalry".

THE INTRO

As GM, Alan asks Filip and Jasmine what their characters have been doing since the last time the group played.

Filip is playing Connor O'Shea, a private investigator, so he narrates how Connor has been working a case with Detective Brianne Devereaux, one of the only legit cops left in Port East, who was one of the main NPCs in the last session. Alan is pleased that Detective Deveraux left a good impression and makes a note to bring her back for a future story.

Jasmine is playing Kostavi, a former hitman for the Russian mob, and takes her turn to narrate what Kostavi has been up to. She tells the group how Kostavi and a bunch of his former friends in the mob have pooled their funds and bought a stake in an up-and-coming synth-jazz club in downtown Little Italy.

Once the group is all caught up on what Connor and Kostavi have been up to, everyone rolls to determine their Reserves and notes them down.

Finally, Alan sets the scene for Act I. It's a rainy day outside, as it always is, and Connor and Kostavi are in the office of the O'Shea Private Investigation Agency, when a shadow appears on the other side of the door's frosted glass pane. The door swings open, and a well-dressed woman walks in. She introduces herself as Andromeda Sain-Cruz, and she says she needs their help.

ACT I

Filip has Connor offer Andromeda a drink and settle her down on the office couch. Andromeda proceeds to explain that her sister, Titanya, has gone missing and she wants to hire Connor and Kostavi to find her and bring her home safe. The PCs readily agree, and Andromeda makes pains to give them the little info she has on Titanya's fiancé, Silvio Amato, a well-known boss in the Neo Nostra. She is convinced he must be behind the disappearance (although Alan knows this is a red herring).

As Andromeda leaves the office, the case is on. Filip and Jasmine decide to have their PCs split up to pursue different leads. Connor heads to Titanya's apartment to look for clues, while Kostavi makes his way to Little Italy to track down Silvio. Alan alternates scenes between Connor and Kostavi's investigations, keeping them running in parallel, switching back and forth to keep the tension up.

As the investigation progresses, both Connor and Kostavi start to turn up evidence that Silvio is innocent. Instead, when they meet back up at the agency office to compare notes, they piece together that the evidence points towards their client, Andromeda, as the true culprit. Confused, but resolved, they call it a night and decide to confront Andromeda in the morning.

ACT II

Jasmine narrates how Kostavi leaves the O'Shea office and heads straight back to Little Italy, spending the night at the synth-jazz club Jasmine mentioned in the Intro. Kostavi plays poker with his friends, spending the night joking and enjoying himself, keeping his mind free of stress and worry. Whatever happens tomorrow, it's not happening tonight.

Filip then tells the group how Connor pulls out the bottle of good whisky from the locked draw in his desk and pours himself a glass. He spends the night alone in quiet contemplation. There's a photo of his sister in the whisky drawer, and Connor tells himself that after this job, he'll finally call her and try and mend the rift in their relationship. Deep down, Connor knows he's lying to himself.

Jasmine notes that she's spent three Reserves, leaving her with two, so she rolls a d10 and adds the result to her Reserves. Filip has only spent one Reserve, so with four remaining cannot gain one at the end of Act II.

ACT III

Connor and Kostavi meet up the next morning, hail a taxi, and make their way to the Sain-Cruz's luxury skyhouse in Glass Town. Andromeda greets them and asks them if they've been able to rescue Titanya from her awful fiancé yet. Connor shakes his head and explains that they have some questions for her. Andromeda, confused, invites them into her sitting room to talk.

Presented with their evidence, Andromeda confesses that she had her sister killed for the inheritance, and she actually hired them to frame Silvio for her to cover up the crime. With a sneer, Andromeda tells them that now they know the truth, she can't allow Connor or Kostavi to live. She snaps her fingers and her hired Nova-Pulsar security forces burst through the door. The bullets start flying and the PCs have to make a desperate escape under fire!

A run-and-gun firefight breaks out in the skyhouse. Connor and Kostavi make their way to Andromeda's garage and, after a tense few actions, Kostavi successfully hotwires a flashy Janus sports-coupé and the PCs make their escape.

OUTRO

Filip and Jasmine agree that their characters decide to skip town for a few days while they try to figure out exactly what they've gotten themselves caught up in. Each of them takes a few minutes to narrate where their character goes, and how the events of the story have changed them and their relationships.

Alan gives them both 3 experience points for participating in the Outro, then decides how much Heat they've gained.

And, with that, "*Sibling Rivalry*" comes to an end.

THE JOB OF THE GAME MASTER

This section contains some tips and advice for Game Masters. Being a good GM is an acquired skill, and taking on the role can feel daunting, especially if it's your first time. However, there's a lot of fun to be had being the mastermind at work, devising and running the challenges and obstacles your players have to puzzle and fight their way through. With a good group, being GM should never be a thankless task, and the principles we outline here will hopefully make it as easy as possible for you.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

THE MOST IMPORTANT ADVICE

The most important advice we can give you is this: **You can do this**. Trust us. Confidence is the key to being GM; believe in yourself and the rest will follow.

The second most important advice is: if a situation comes up during play and you're not sure how to resolve it, a good rule of thumb is to ask "If this were an action movie, what would I expect to happen next?" Then just do that. If that doesn't provide a fun enough answer, just blow something up or have someone start shooting (or both).

Being a Game Master is hard work, but it can be one of the most enjoyable parts of roleplaying games. Remember to always keep in mind that you have as much right to have fun as the players do, and when things negatively impact your fun, it's important to communicate that.

If any of the rules in this book make it harder for you as GM, you can – and absolutely should – change them. What we talk about in this section is more advice than concrete mechanical rules. You should take it as such, and if it doesn't work with you or your group, that's OK! Every GM and every group plays differently. Our goal is to enable a wide variety of playstyles and give your group the tools for success.

KEEP IT FUN, KEEP IT COOL, KEEP IT MOVING

It's important to keep the pace up, make sure everyone is having fun, and keep the story moving! This can take a lot of practice but, as you get more experience as a GM, you'll become more adept at it, learning how to innately read the mood and pace of the game. If a scene isn't working, you can always cut it short and move on to the exciting bits – there's no point belabouring details no one is paying attention to!

TREAT EVERYONE AT THE TABLE FAIRLY

It's important not to play favourites with, or pick on, one player over the others at the table. Telling the story so that one PC has a run of good or bad luck can be fun, if done judiciously, but it should never become a long-term part of the GM's interactions with a player. Be sure to spread your attention around and give every player their moment in the spotlight.

SAYING "NO"

One of the hardest lessons to learn as a GM is when to say "no". If the players don't act in a way you want, it can be easy to tell them, "No, that doesn't fit with my plan". The problem with "no" in the context of an RPG is two-fold:

First, it chills the story. A flat "no" is hard to overcome; it doesn't give the other half of the conversation something to work with or against.

Second, it makes a player feel unheard. Players who feel ignored, unheard, or disregarded are not likely to engage with the game or story, and that's the exact opposite of our goal when playing RPGs!

Instead of "No", try working with "Yes, but..." and "No, but...". Instead of simply shutting something down, try proposing an alternative situation, solution, or event that can be seen as a compromise. The goal is to keep the game moving, the story flowing, and everyone involved.

"No" almost never does that.

LISTEN CAREFULLY AND ADAPT

Listen to what's being said at the table, avoid taking anything personally, and adjust what you're doing based on feedback. The best way to improve your skills as a GM is to listen to fair criticism, take it on board, and learn from it.

BE PREPARED

Nothing throws cold water on a session faster than an unprepared Game Master. It's easy for an unprepared GM to make easily avoidable mistakes, which can cause the session – or even the campaign – to unravel. You don't need to plan every session in exacting detail, but you should have an outline of what you intend to have happen, as well being familiar with the rules. Don't forget to check your notes from last time, whip up a few NPCs you might think will show up, check how you want to tie it all together, and generally give everything a good once-over as you get ready.

IT'S NOT A COMPETITION

Roleplaying games are a collaborative experience, not a competitive one. The GM isn't trying to beat the players and the players aren't trying to beat the GM. Both sides have the same shared goal: telling an awesome story and having a good time. That's it. That's all there is to it.

FAILING CAN BE FUN, BUT MUST BE MANAGED

Consistent and repetitive failure isn't terribly fun, but big dramatic failures at exactly the right time are. Encourage players to lean into the failure if they want, but never force them to feel bad or mock them for failing. Failure can be funny, it can be dramatic, it can be heartbreaking, but it should never be trite, repetitive, or dismissive.

This advice applies both in character and out of character! No one wants to feel like their supposedly competent character is useless, and no player wants to feel bad for making a mistake out of character. Remember that the game rules allow a failed test to be a "success with complications" rather than just a flat failure when the situation allows, and don't hesitate to allow a player to adjust their character and their approach as they get a better feel for the game. Punishing someone for something they didn't know isn't fun for anyone.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

It's easy to overthink, overanalyse, and over-plan for a roleplaying game. A game can never be too easy to run or experience, and overpreparing a session can often do more harm than good. Work to scale the experience in this game to your group's tastes and remember that keeping it simple keeps it accessible.

TAKE BREAKS

If the players throw you for a loop, catch you off guard, or you just had a big, pivotal scene, it's OK to call for a five-minute break so that you can catch your breath and plan your next steps.

RUNNING A CAMPAIGN

There are a lot of ways to play *Crescendo of Violence*, from a single one-shot session to an ongoing, extended story.

If you want to just try the game out, get comfortable with the system, or find yourselves looking for something to do for an evening, you can run *Crescendo of Violence* as a single adventure for one game session, focused on a quick "pick-up" game where all your players have a big dramatic adventure, and you move on to another game or story the next time you play.

But while *Crescendo of Violence* works great as a one-shot, it really sings as a campaign, where the game can reward players who experience the story over a connected series of sessions. Campaigns can vary greatly in length, from short, fixed-length affairs to rolling stories with no set end in sight.

If you want to play a short, fixed-term campaign, you can limit it either by narrative ("We're going to play until we reach a specific, pre-planned ending to the story") or by number of sessions ("We're going to play for three months or twelve sessions"). Or, if you'd prefer a grand, sweeping epic with no fixed end, just plan out the first session or two and let the story take you where it may.

If you're running more than one session, a campaign (short or long) is a series of linked adventures much like a series of a TV show, where plot threads and characters carry from one episode to the next, but each individual episode tends to have its own beginning, middle, and end. By its structure, *Crescendo of Violence* lends itself to this sort of "mission of the week" style, where most sessions are essentially stand-alone stories. Each week, the next job could be a heist, an investigation into a missing witness, or clearing a gang out of a nearby district.

The best part of campaigns is the chance to see character growth; watching the PCs gain new and impressive abilities, layering emotional experiences on emotional experiences to create a deeper and more authentic narrative, and getting a chance to really explore the world the game takes place in.

This campaign structure does impose a burden on the Game Master, who must maintain a narrative from session to session, but keep it loose enough for each session to stand alone. Since the mission is different each session, and the cast of supporting NPCs will vary and change each time, it's the problems, identities, lives, and troubles of the PCs that will need to form the core of a cohesive story.

When running a campaign, use the **Intro** and **Outro** parts of the session structure to let each player address how their character has grown and changed, and tell you what the "theme" is in their character's story is for the session, which you can then work to weave into the narrative.

The players are in total control of their characters, how they feel and think. Your job as the GM is to present obstacles and situations for the PCs to react to and drive forward against. Encourage the players to be proactive and take the initiative with regard to their characters.

NARRATIVE CONTROL

Unlike the author of a book, the director of a movie, or the composer of a piece of music, the Game Master does not control every note, beat, and motif of the story that unfolds at the table when you play *Crescendo of Violence*.

When a group is creating a story, control is shared between all the participants, rather than residing under the sole authority of a singular individual. Players will use their Momentum and action tokens to add details to scenes and, as the GM, it's important that you don't try to simply negate or override details that the players add to the game through their resources and creativity.

It can be easy for the GM to grow frustrated or see the players as undermining or derailing the story they've prepared. However, such a situation is actually an opportunity to create a deeper and more compelling narrative. When the players present unique, off-the-wall, or unusual solutions to problems, the GM has the chance to adjust the story to create a modified narrative where players feel directly involved (rather than feeling constrained by what the GM is forcing on them).

A lot of the time the players will come up with a better idea or solution than you had planned. It's totally OK to steal that and integrate it into your game. If you like the idea they're proposing better than yours, run with it!

RPGs are a team effort, so don't hesitate to use the team. It'll be a better experience in the long run if you do.

RUNNING A SAFE GAME

As we've discussed, RPGs are an exciting medium, but with the unparalleled amount of freedom comes significant potential for issues to arise. It's important to have tools on hand to ensure that everyone has the maximum amount of fun they can at the table.

Not every joke is as funny as we think it is before we say it, not every interaction is positive, and every player brings their own unique life experience to the table. It is a worthy task to ensure everyone remains free of any emotional or mental concerns that might hinder their ability to enjoy themselves.

The goal is to have fun, but that fun is only as good as the fun the entire group has. The fun of one person should never come at the expense of the fun, safety, or comfort of anyone else in the group.

Not every tool we're going to discuss needs to be used. Your group is unique to you, and your interactions are too. You should find the right solution for your group and table, regardless of what we say here. These are simply some best practices and suggestions and, like everything in this book, they're a toolkit. The better you know each other personally outside of the game, the less actively you'll need to use them. Conversely, the less well you know each other, the more relevant these tools will likely be.

These tools serve to protect the GM as much as the players. As GM, you should feel free to use them as readily as the players (and perhaps even more so).

The goal of these tools comes down to one essential principle: communication. Honest, open, and trusting communication allows a group to share an experience in good faith and enjoy each other's company and laughter.

SESSION ZERO

A common tabletop roleplaying term is "Session Zero". Session Zero is when the group meets up prior to the game starting to make their characters together and collectively discuss the story they want to tell. This is a good chance for the GM to float ideas for the story (in broad strokes) and head off any potential concerns before the game gets underway and it's too late to easily change course.

An excellent shorthand to use to establish a baseline of what to expect in terms of tone and material is movie rating scales, as well as references to specific media. Everyone tells stories differently, and working to establish a strong common foundation between you and your players is essential to a successful campaign.

AFTER-SESSION CHECK-IN

After a session is over, holding a check-in with the players helps to keep communication flowing. Ask the players what worked, what didn't, and what you as GM can do to maximise fun for everyone.

Such check-ins ensure that any misunderstandings, concerns, or conversations can be addressed. However, sometimes players need to have some space to think and form a response. Therefore, we recommend that the GM maintains open communication between sessions as well.

OPEN AND CLEAR LINES OF COMMUNICATION

As GM, you should maintain an easy way for players to communicate with you privately about any issues that come up. No one benefits from feeling like they were attacked or called out for their roleplaying, and a private conversation often goes a long way towards resolving any issues.

AT-THE-TABLE TOOLS

There are several methods and tools for handling any safety concerns at the tabletop as you play. A quick internet search will provide you with many of them. Each group requires different things from their table, and we leave it to you to do your research and learn what might best work for your group.

Everyone at the table, GM and players alike, is responsible for ensuring that everyone has the most fun they can playing *Crescendo of Violence* (or any other RPG). Shirking this responsibility is one of the greatest harms you can conduct against your fellow players, and it only serves to hurt the community, rather than building it up.

CHARACTER CREATION

If you want to play *Crescendo of Violence*, you'll need to create a character.

All PCs are exceptional individuals, capable of making an impact on the world around them (at least locally and to those they know), and are people who exist in the dangerous margins of the hyper-commercialised world of Neo York.

THE GOAL OF A CHARACTER

First, you need to think about the sort of character you want to play. Talk some of your ideas through with the GM and the other players. Everyone's character should feel unique, but also have something that ties them together with the other PCs.

If it helps, you can answer some or all of the following questions to get a feel for who your character is and what they're about.

WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

Which of Neo York's districts do you live in? Are you Neo York born and bred, or did you arrive later in life? What about your parents and extended family? If you aren't from Neo York, what brought you here?

WHAT'S YOUR LOOK?

Are you tall or short? Broad-shouldered or whip-thin? What are your hair and eye colours? Is there anything distinctive about your appearance? Do you have cybernetics? If so, how do they look and impact you?

HOW DO YOU EARN YOUR SCRATCH?

It can be hard to make ends meet in Neo York, especially if you're down on your luck. How do you do it?

WHO HAVE YOU HURT?

What did you feel afterwards? What did they feel afterwards? Would you do it again?

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT CRIME?

Almost everyone in Neo York knows someone who is involved in organised crime. Do you? Who is it? What do you think about them?

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS CITY?

What do you think is the biggest issue in Neo York? What would you fix first if all the power was in your hands? What is the biggest detriment to living here? How do you deal with it day-to-day?

WHAT HOLDS YOU BACK?

Do you have past trauma? Do you have chronic bad luck? Do you have a bad reputation, deserved or undeserved?

WHO HAS IT OUT FOR YOU?

What enemies lie in your past? How did your paths cross? When did you last see them? Do they tie in with any other PC's enemies?

THE CHARACTER CREATION PROCESS

After you've figured out who your character is, it's time to put the mechanical framework in place. Having a well-rounded and fleshed out character concept is great, but you also need to establish the underlying mechanics that allow your character to function and resolve actions while playing the game.

There are four steps to make a character:

1. CHOOSE YOUR ORIGIN

Your origin determines your background, physical origins, and where you come from. There are five origins: Natural, Bioroid, Clone, Cyborg, and Gen-G. These are listed from page 96.

2. CHOOSE YOUR PROFESSION

Your profession is what you do, the skills you've learned, and how you make your living. Your profession will give you:

- A bonus to one path (choosing between two options)
- A Cred rating
- Two talents (chosen from a list of options)
- A special ability that only those of that profession have.

There are seven professions in the game: Criminal, Hacker, Holo-Star, Investigator, Musician, Suit, and Veteran. These are listed from page 99.

3. CHOOSE A THIRD TALENT

In addition to the two talents you get from your profession, you will choose a third talent, which can be anything you want from the list on page 106.

You'll also pick out some equipment to round out your character.

4. INTRODUCE YOUR CHARACTERS

As a group, introduce your characters to each other and answer the three questions prompted by the profession you chose. Each answer should be one of the other PCs. You can use the same person for multiple answers if it makes sense, but give everyone a chance to weigh in. Always be sure to get mutual agreement when assigning these answers.

You can't change your origin or profession once you've started playing, so think carefully about what you choose!

ORIGINS

NATURAL

Your common or garden natural-born human. Naturals comprise the vast majority of Neo York's population and can be found in all walks of life. Naturals don't modify their genetics too much outside of medical treatments, and rarely have extensive cybernetics.

Starting Paths: Naturals start with a path rating of 2 for each path.
Gotta Prove Yourself: Naturals start with an additional Reserve (6 instead of 5).

BIOROID

Bioroids are machines made to appear human, created for the express purpose of fulfilling a particular task or function. Most of the world's armies, security forces, and law enforcement organisations are comprised of bioroids – Neo York being no exception – because they have to follow the orders set out in their programming.

While they are created with a specific skill set, by international law bioroids are offered a series of educational and employment options after their creation. Their low-grade learning AIs expand and grow much like a human brain does, using machine learning to advance on a capped scale.

Starting Paths: Bioroids start with a path rating of 2 for each path. They may then increase their path rating by 2 for the path that best represents their stated purpose, and by 1 for three other paths of their choice that represent backup skills and what they picked up during their mandatory education.
Living Machines: Bioroids aren't human, they're robots. They can't spend experience points to increase their path ratings. Instead, bioroids can spend experience points to add +1 to a single die total per experience point spent during game play. For example, if a bioroid were to spend 3 experience points, they would add +3 to a single die result. They also gain +2d10 on tests made to overcome or deal with poison, toxins, suffocation, or exhaustion.

CLONE

Clones are humans grown for specific purposes. Where bioroids combine machine and organic matter, clones are 100% pure farm-grown flesh. They are generally created to fulfil a specific role in society, often for tasks considered too demeaning or menial for naturals.

Like bioroids, clones must be offered multiple educational and employment choices. A clone grows and learns just like a human.

Starting Paths: Clones start with a path rating of 2 for each path. They may then increase two path ratings by 2, representing the purpose they were grown for, and a third path rating by 1, representing their limited education.
Bred Expertise: Clones underline one of their paths during character creation. Whenever they make a test using this underlined path, they may reroll any dice that show a "1" once. They never roll less than 2d10 when using this path, regardless of any penalties.

CYBORG

More machine than man, a cyborg is a natural that has undergone extensive cybernetic modification, turning their original human frame into something more. Not bound by programming restrictions like a bioroid, cyborgs are fully human, but elevated via technology.

Starting Paths: Cyborgs start with a path rating of 2 for each path.
Cybernetics: Cyborgs get up to 20 Cost worth of cybernetics (page 122).

ARE NATURALS UNDERPOWERED?

It might seem like natural-born humans are at a disadvantage. That's because they are. Science has made humanity obsolete, so if you're a natural, you've got an uphill battle ahead of you.

GEN-G

Generation G, as they're called, are the portion of the population who have dramatically altered who they are via genetic modification. They're the flesh and blood side of humanity's technological evolution, and they can get pretty weird.

Starting Paths: Gen-Gs start with a path rating of 1 for each path. They can then increase their path ratings by a total of 13, spread across all paths however they choose, but with no single path rating going above 4.

Genetically Modified: Gen-Gs have extensive genetic modifications, or genemods for short, that give them their enhanced abilities. However, genemods don't play nice with cybernetics. For every cybernetic implant a genemod has, they reduce their maximum number of Reserves by one.

ON THE OUTS

Each profession has a "why are you on the outs" section. Remember, characters in *Crescendo of Violence* are exceptional people who exist on the fringes of society – but something has to push you to the fringes. This section helps you make sure you know how you got there, so you and the GM can hang story and character elements on it. We provide some examples with each archetype, but encourage you to create your own if one does not fit your character idea.

It's encouraged that you tie your characters's reasons for being on the outs together, as you work to create an interesting backstory to your characters and how they all intersect.

PROFESSIONS

CRIMINAL

Criminals either work for themselves (a dangerous proposition in Neo York) or for a crime syndicate like the Neo Nostra, Yakuza, or Triads.

Criminals are primarily employed by gangs and crime families, though some corporations and law enforcement find a use for informers and those willing to be deniable assets and do the dirty work no one else will.

Why are you on the outs? Being a criminal is as steady a gig as you can find in Neo York, so how did you screw it up? You probably weren't calling the shots, but you had a crew that worked for you, you the important jobs, and you got rewarded for them. So what went wrong?

1. You got a case of the morals during a high-profile gig and you turned in some of your compatriots. Now your boss wants you to get a case of the deads.
2. Your organization was run out of town by some rivals, and you didn't want leave. Now you're a career criminal without a career.
3. You were skimming off the top. Normally, that isn't too bad (it's almost expected), but you got framed for taking more than you did by a rival in the family. Now you're out and they're on the rise.

Path Bonus: Gain +1 to SNEAKY or +1 to FAST.
Cred Rating: 2d10
Talents: Choose two from Blind Luck, Drifter, Maverick, and Status.
Special Ability: When interacting with members of your criminal organisation (or criminals you've worked with in the past if you're a free agent), you may spend a Reserve to gain +1d10 on a test.
Three Questions:

- Who here knows some of the shady stuff you've done? What do they know and what do they think of it?
- Who knows the worst thing you've done on behalf of your bosses? What was it and how do they view you now?
- Who helped you commit some crimes to make sure your bosses stay happy? What were those crimes, and would they do it again?

HACKER

Hackers are those skilled in manipulating technology through the WETnet. They can leverage the tech around them to gain an advantage over those nearby. A hacker might work for a corporation, protecting their assets against other hackers, or you might be freelance, doing whatever jobs and clients come your way.

For a corporation, a hacker often serves as a "white hat", working to ensure the corporation's firewalls and defences are maintained against those who seek to do the corporation harm. The inverse is true for freelance hackers (hackers directly employed by organised crime are rare, they're a proud and individualistic bunch) working as "black hats" who hack into and steal information from their targets at the behest of their employers.

Why are you on the outs? In this high-tech world, being good with tech is a neon-ticket to success. You can't go wrong being the person who makes the machines work (or not work, depending on whose paying you). So why are you scrounging around the edges of society? Why aren't you in a cushy office in a sky-rise, working for the top company in Neo Work?

1. You found secrets you weren't supposed to during a hack. Your ID was flagged and burned by government or corporate interests and now you are too hot to touch.
2. You got stiffed by an employer, and in an act of revenge, you torched their servers and dumped all their dirty laundry onto the wetNET. Now they want you dead, and their rivals do too.
3. You overslept a contract (seriously) and they assumed you got flipped on them. Now they want to haul you in and "terminate" your contract. Gotta get it sorted before you catch a case of "bulletitis."

Path Bonus: Gain +1 to CLEVER or +1 SNEAKY.
Cred Rating: 2d10
Talents: Choose two from Contacts, Educated, Fame, and Safehouse.
Special Ability: You can hack (page 130).
Three Questions:

- Who have you hacked before, and what have you found out about them? What was the outcome of that?
- Who bailed you out of a bad situation you got into when attempting a hack? What was the situation?
- Who brought you some gear when you needed it and couldn't get to it? How have you paid them back?

HOLO-STAR

Holo-stars are those who've appeared in enough holos or neons to be recognised by regular consumers of the medium, although probably not the average passer-by on the street (that takes a real A-lister in this day and age).

Holo-stars often are tied to corporations, for whom they serve as spokespeople and pretty faces to go alongside their ubiquitous product placement. It's well known in Neo York, however, that many holo-stars have close ties to organised crime. Often their careers are bought and paid for by mob bosses long before they ever appear in a holo-play.

Why are you on the outs? Chances are the outs as a holo-star is still a pretty good gig. Popularity doesn't mean you aren't on the fringes, and folks knowing your name and face doesn't mean you don't have to make ends meet.

1. You took a gig for a holo, where the money was too good to pass up. That's because it *was* too good. It was a money laundering front for a crime family, and they made you the fall-person for it. And while you're not behind bars right now, even close contacts have taken to pretending you don't exist.
2. You made the most critically-acclaimed holo of the last decade, but ever since, you haven't been able to make a hit. You can barely make ends meet, and you can't rest on your laurels for much longer. You're looking for the next vehicle that'll take you back to the top.
3. You were in love, and you got punished for it. Someone leaked your personal life details to the public, and ever since, no one wants to touch you or work with you. Oh, and your lover left you. Damn.

Path Bonus: Gain +1 to EMPATHETIC or +1 to DRAMATIC.
Cred Rating: 3d10
Talents: Choose two from Blind Luck, Contacts, Fame, and Family Money.
Special Ability: You're very recognisable. Whenever you meet someone new, you may spend a Reserve, and they know who you are and like your work, allowing you to leverage that.
Three Questions:

- Who was your friend before you got big? How do they help keep your feet on the ground?
- Who introduced you to your agent and helped you get started?
- Who is a little starstruck by you?

INVESTIGATOR

Investigators might be law enforcement, corporate fixers, privately licensed, or local vigilantes. People employ an investigator when they need something unsavoury dug up. It doesn't pay great, but it's a living.

An investigator generally works for themselves in the long run, though they often have corporate, law enforcement, or criminal clients aplenty. A savvy investigator knows how to thread that dangerous needle, maintaining a careful balance between all the groups who might vie for their attention.

Why are you on the outs? You could be working for the Neo York police, as a corporate investigator, or employed by any of the numerous world agencies. So why don't you work for someone else? Why are you scrounging month over month in a dingy apartment, with your name half-peeling off the door?

1. Like all good detective stories, this one starts with a cheating spouse, a missing gun, and a city-wide corruption scandal. Unlike all good stories, this one ends with you catching a bullet in the head, unless you can solve it. Can't show your face too much or be too flashy until you get it figured out.
2. Your partner at the investigation firm was onto something hot and it got them killed. You didn't finish the case, instead preferring to lay low, not making waves. They were better than you at this, and if they got dead, you can too. Easier to hide out on the fringes.
3. You got an innocent person caught and framed for a crime they didn't commit. The money was good, but the guilt eats you up inside. You've been unable to do more than the bare minimum since then, and you know that you'll have to make it right one day.

Path Bonus: Gain +1 to EMPATHETIC or +1 to RESOLUTE.
Cred Rating: 1d10
Talents: Choose two from Bounty Hunter, Drifter, Hard to Kill, Law Enforcement, and Maverick.
Special Ability: When you make a test while trying to gather information, question others, or put the pieces of a puzzle together, you may spend a Reserve to gain +1d10 on it.
Three Questions:

- Who here did you encounter during the course of an investigation? Were you investigating them? What were you investigating?
- Who once bailed you out when you got in over your head?
- Who is the drinking buddy that you vent to after a particularly rough job?

MUSICIAN

Musicians of all stripes are in high demand in Neo York. They often work for themselves, though the successful ones will tend to be a regular at one or more synth-jazz clubs. Still, good musicians will also often find themselves playing gigs for high-ranking suits, spoiled elites, and dangerous mob bosses often enough. Whatever keeps the GFTs rolling in.

Why are you on the outs? Music is a big deal, and you could have been a big deal too. Trained by some of the best, known for your technique, or simply too good-looking to disregard, you could have had it all. Now you're playing seedy clubs, low-rent bars, and back-alley gigs at speakeasies as you figure it out.

1. You were in a band. You were starting to get big, and you decided to go off on a solo career. A few drug benders later, you'd burned all your bridges, lost everything. Now you're clean, and you are just realizing you gotta start it all over again.
2. You were commissioned to create a piece for the birthday of a crime boss, and while you composed a masterpiece, they didn't see it that way. They made sure you'll never work a high-class gig in this town again... and that you could never leave town. So now you suffer, playing your masterpieces for folks who will never appreciate them.
3. On the outs? You're not on the outs. You are famous. Sure, it's for playing the worst gig in the history of Neo York, one critically reviled and endlessly parodied in all the holo-plays, but hey. You're famous.

Path Bonus: Gain +1 to DRAMATIC or +1 to FAST.
Cred Rating: 3d10
Talents: Choose two from Fame, Contacts, Drifter, and Focus.
Special Ability: You can gain access nearly anywhere. You may spend a Reserve to gain access to any social scene.
Three Questions:

- Who likes to hear you play and goes out of their way to do it?
- Who do you bounce your new musical ideas off?
- Who keeps you honest when you start to go off the rails?

SUIT

Suits work in an office for a corporation, government, or similar organisation. They have money (at least more than most people). They know how to get around inside the rules and structures of corporate entities, leveraging the weird quirks and loopholes only lifers really know.

While suits are predominantly corporate types, criminal organisations and gangs often have suits on the payroll, either managing their financial accounts, providing them with insider information, or helping them plan and target heists and robberies.

Why are you on the outs? What causes a corp suit to fall from grace? Even if you still have money, contacts, and knowledge, you're no longer the power player you once were. And that just won't do. You likely want your way back into the game. So why have you ended up in the dingy, neon-lit gutters of Neo York?

1. Your ethics got in the way of a business deal with some shady characters, and you got pushed out.
2. You got framed for a crime you didn't commit, and lost your welcome in the industry during your attempts to clear your name.
3. You have no idea. You were the rising star one day, and the next day, your access chip was revoked, your name was off the directory, and no one will return your calls.

Path Bonus: Gain +1 to CLEVER or +1 to CAUTIOUS.
Cred Rating: 4d10
Talents: Choose two from Corporate Star, Family Money, Gambler, and Status.
Special Ability: You may spend a Reserve to gain +1d10 on tests made to overcome, leverage, or manipulate corporate interests, policies, or activities.
Three Questions:

- Who do you know from the old days, before you worked for a corp? What do they think of your current occupation?
- Who bailed you out of a jam you got into when attempting to get ahead at work? What was the jam?
- Who have you bent the rules for at work? Why? What happens if it's found out?

VETERAN

Veterans are those who have fought in one of the many wars of the past half-century, either for a mercenary company, a foreign power, or the UN. They tend to be bitter and have seen a lot. Nowadays, most veterans are pretty hard up, and have had to take work they don't really like.

Veterans work for whoever pays them. A veteran might end up as a hitman or enforcer for organised crime, as protection for an investigator, or as a security guard for a corporation. There's always a need for a triggerman in the 2090s, after all.

Why are you on the outs? Honestly, it's not too hard to explain. The world isn't kind, you aren't kind, and there's little reason to assume things would have been better when you got out. You did some things you'd rather not talk about, and not talking means it's hard to find work.

1. You went into private security after you left the public service. You hated it, but it paid well. But after you bailed on a client whose skyhouse was attacked, your professional reputation was official shot.
2. You became a triggerman for the mob after you got out. After all, it was basically the same work you did in the military, and it paid better. But you missed a shot and put a bullet in someone you didn't mean to, and now you're out to make it right.
3. You never stopped fighting the war, even when you left. Nowadays you fight it with whisky and rum, but the battle rages all the same. You're washed-up, barely getting by. How are you gonna prove to those who care about you that you're still the person they know?

Path Bonus: Gain +1 to VIOLENT or +1 to RESOLUTE.
Cred Rating: 1d10
Talents: Choose two from Favourite Weapon, Hard to Kill, Killer, Sniper, and Tough as Nails.
Special Ability: When you make a damage roll, you may spend a Reserve to add +1d10 to it.
Three Questions:

- Who here was the one of the first friends you made after you came back? Why did you become friends?
- Who here can relate to what you've been through and allows you to confide in them?
- Who tries to keep you moving forward when you struggle to see the hope in it all?

TALENTS

You start with two talents from your profession, as well as a third of your choice. As you gain experience points, you can spend them to get more talents (page 72).

Some talents are **ranked**. This means that they can be taken multiple times for an increased effect. Talents are abilities that your character has and are always applicable (as long as they make sense narratively – you can't benefit from Favourite Weapon when you don't have your favourite weapon with you).

You may never have more than three ranks in a talent.

AMBIDEXTROUS

When you make an attack with a weapon in each hand, you gain +1d10 to the test.

BLIND LUCK *RANKED*

For each rank in this talent, you may reroll a test once per session. You must reroll all the dice in the test.

BODYGUARD

You can take damage for an ally within melee range of you. When an ally is hit by an attack, spend a Momentum or a Reserve, and you count as having been the target of the attack. The attack is still successful, and damage is rolled, but add +2 to your RESOLUTE for resisting the damage.

BOUNTY HUNTER

During the Intro or Act I, you can designate one NPC as your **Bounty**. You gain +1d10 on opposed tests against them, and if you can bring them in during the Outro, you gain one additional Reserve during the next session.

COLD READING

When you make a test to discern something about someone by reading their tells, habits, or appearance, add +1d10 to the roll.

COMMON SENSE *RANKED*

You've got a good head on your shoulders, and you rarely make bad decisions.

For each rank in this talent, you can spend a Momentum to ask the GM one question that they must answer honestly, with as much detail as they feel the narrative requires. Your question should relate to a decision your character is making that carries some risk or narrative weight.

CONTACTS

You know folks around town. Write down which organisation or district of Neo York your contacts are from. You start with a contact with a Loyalty of 2 and Resources of 2 (see page 140 for more on contacts).

Additionally, during Acts I and II, you may spend a Momentum to gain a resource or favour from someone you know in that organisation.

CORPORATE STAR *RANKED*

You're a corporate star, a rising executive in a megacorp. You may spend a Reserve to call in a favour from someone you know in the corporate world. The more significant the favour, the higher the Reserve's value needs to be. For each rank in this talent after the first, you count the Reserve as having +1 value (so a value 5 Reserve would be 6 at rank 2, or 7 at rank 3)

DANGER SENSE

When you are surprised, ambushed, or caught unawares in some way, you can spend a Momentum to take an immediate action.

DRIFTER

You don't have a real home, you just wander the streets of Neo York. There aren't many upsides, but one is that you know the streets better than most. By spending a Reserve, you can find a safehouse or place to hide where pursuers can't find you. The higher the value of the Reserve, the safer and more off the beaten path the safehouse is. However, you suffer -1d10 on any social tests made in high society or corporate settings.

DRIVER

You're the driver, and you're damn good at it. You gain +1d10 on tests made to pilot, repair, evade, or tail while in a vehicle. You can spend a Momentum for an additional +1d10 (you can do this multiple times on the same test).

EDUCATED *RANKED*

You are well-educated, either through the school system, extensive self-learning, or other methods. For each rank in this talent, you gain +1d10 on tests related to what you've learned from your academic pursuits. You don't need to define this explicitly, though between you and the GM, it's good to have some limits on what you know. Remember to frame this in an academic sense.

FAME *RANKED*

You are famous (or infamous). You gain +1d10 per rank on any tests made to overwhelm or impress someone with your reputation.

FAMILY MONEY

Your family is disgustingly rich, and you have your own slice of the wealth. You gain +2d10 to your Cred rating (this can take it above 5d10). However, you suffer -2d10 on social tests with those who might be put off by your wealth and status.

FAST AS ALL HELL

When you regain an action token by spending reserves, it only takes a 1–4 value reserve to regain a yellow action token and a 5–10 value reserve for a green action token.

FAST TALKER

When you land yourself in hot water and make a test to try and talk yourself out of it, add +1d10 to the roll.

FEARSOME REPUTATION *RANKED*

You are known as a person of violence and decisive action. This reputation carries weight. When you threaten someone with violence, brandish a weapon, or leverage your reputation in an intimidating manner to get what you want, you can spend a Momentum to impose a -1d10 penalty on the next test they make. Each additional rank increases the penalty you impose by -1d10.

FAVOURITE WEAPON

Pick one of your weapons. That one's your favourite. Explain why it's significant. You gain +1d10 to attacks and damage with that weapon, but suffer -1d10 to attacks and damage with all other weapons.

GAMBLER

You like high-stakes gambles; nothing beats the rush you get from them. You've also got connections at pretty much every gambling establishment of note in town, and can get in pretty easily. You take +1d10 to tests involving games of chance, and +1d10 to your Cred rating, though any time you lose a game of chance, you lose -1d10 from your Cred rating until the start of the next session.

GUN-FU *RANKED*

You are skilled in the use of guns to the point of an art form. Choose one of the following benefits for each rank you have in this talent:

- **Rapid Reload:** If your gun would run out of ammo, spend a reserve of any value to instantly reload it without needing to spend an action.
- **Guns Akimbo:** If you are wielding two guns, gain +1d10 to attacks against opponents with guns if you spent a red or yellow action token.
- **Quick Draw:** The first time you spend a green action token each combat, you gain an additional +1d10 on the test.
- **Bullet Time:** You can spend two Momentum to take three additional actions after you take an action in combat (rather than one Momentum for one action). You cannot spend more Momentum for further actions after these actions are resolved.

HACKER

You're tech savvy and highly skilled with WETnet technology. You can **Hack** as per the rules on page 130.

HARD TO KILL *RANKED*

For each rank in this talent, count your RESOLUTE as 1 higher when resisting damage.

KILLER

You're a professional assassin, one of the best. Your damage rolls are increased by +1d10, and you gain one Momentum whenever you kill a target.

LARGE *RANKED*

For each rank in this talent, you gain +1d10 on tests that would benefit from brute strength or your physical size, but suffer -1d10 on all FAST tests. You cannot take the Small talent.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

You're part of a law enforcement organisation. You suffer -2d10 on social tests with criminals or anyone who would have a reason to distrust cops (which is most of Neo York, quite frankly), but you can spend a reserve to get access to any location (within reason), or requisition some equipment you might need.

LOGICAL

When you make a test to put the pieces of a puzzle together or deduce the solution to a conundrum, add +1d10 to the roll.

MARTIAL ARTIST *RANKED*

You are a trained and deadly martial artist, as capable with your bare hands as most are with a weapon. Choose one of the following benefits for each rank you have in this talent:

- **Brutal Fury:** You gain +1d10 to damage rolls made while unarmed. You may pick this benefit multiple times.
- **Lightning Speed:** If you kill or drop a foe with an unarmed attack, you may immediately make an action to move.
- **Flurry of Blows:** If you hit a foe with an unarmed attack, you may immediately make another attack with a -2d10 penalty.

MAVERICK

When someone tells you not to do something risky, foolish, or dramatic, you must spend a reserve or attempt to go out and do it at some point during this session. However, you gain +1 reserve at the start of each session.

NEO-NATIVE

You were born and raised in Neo York and know the city like the back of your hand. Each session, you gain one additional downtime action (page 68) or you may take two downtime actions in the same act of the session.

SAFEHOUSE *RANKED*

You have a safehouse you can relax in. Choose one of the following benefits for each rank you have in this talent.

- **Security:** Any tests made to locate or break into your safehouse take a -1d10 penalty. You may pick this benefit multiple times.
- **Rest Up:** Once per session, when you return to your safehouse, you (or someone with you) may recover a reserve.
- **Stash:** Once per session, when you return to your safehouse, you (or someone with you) may gain a piece of equipment worth 5 Cost or less that you had hidden there.

SLEUTH

You're an expert investigator with a nose for evidence. You gain +1d10 on tests made to gather evidence at a scene or question witnesses.

SMALL *RANKED*

For each rank in this talent, you gain +1d10 on tests that would benefit from your small size, such as squeezing through ducts and avoiding high obstacles, but suffer -1d10 on all RESOLUTE tests. You cannot take the Large talent.

SMOOTH TALKER

When make a test to use your silver tongue, schmooze someone, or bring someone round to your way of thinking, add +1d10 to the roll.

SNIPER *RANKED*

For each rank in this talent, you gain +1d10 when making ranged attacks if you haven't had the spotlight for at least three actions.

STATUS *RANKED*

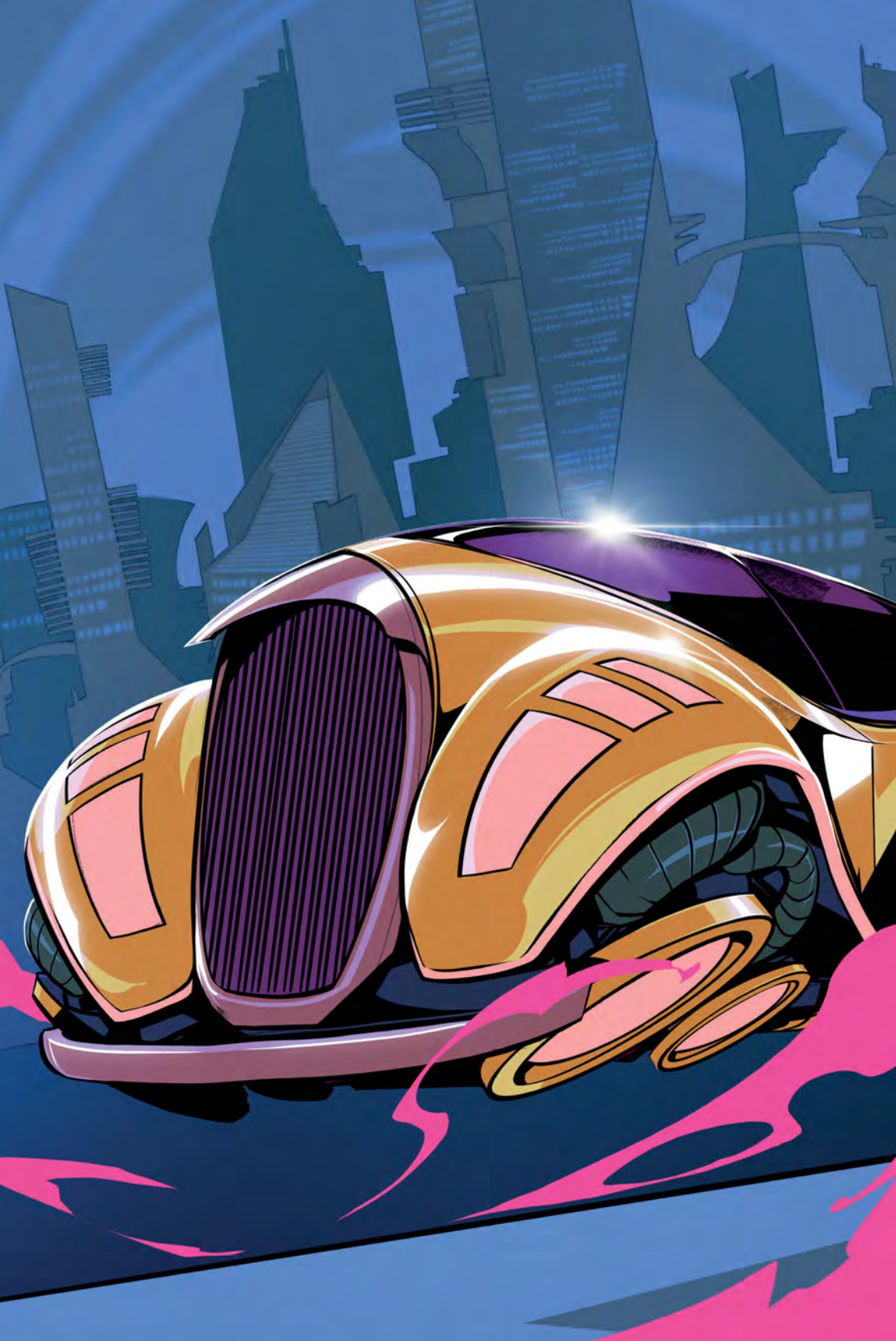
You have pull and status within a particular organisation (choose which one). Each rank in this talent gives you +1d10 on tests to leverage that association (either internally within the organisation or externally with others).

TOUGH AS NAILS

If you discard your green action token due to damage, you may immediately take a yellow action token. This allows you to have up to two yellow action tokens.

QUICK STEP

You may spend a green or yellow action token to take an immediate action to move.



EQUIPMENT AND GEAR

STARTING EQUIPMENT

Each character starts with any gear that their player and the GM agree is reasonable (weapon, armour, basic electronics) and a suitable place to live in line with their Cred rating. Everyone also has access to the following gear:

- **Earlink:** A small worn or implanted earbud used for wireless communication. Think of it as the smartphone of 2093.
- **AR Glasses:** The most common way to view augmented reality.
- **Dumb-Box:** A small wrist-worn or implanted device that allows the user to interact with computing terminals. Dumb-Boxes are so-called because they have zero AI functionality.
- **Basic Professional Gear:** The tools of the character's trade, such as a private investigator's licence, a synth-jazz musician's repeltech instrument, or a hacker's WETgloves.

Because *Crescendo of Violence* doesn't track currency, it's imperative that the Game Master does not let the player characters go on a wild shopping spree, where they roll dice 'til kingdom come.

To go shopping, a player character must take the **Shop** downtime action (page 70) and then make a successful **Wealth test** by rolling your Cred Rating against the cost of the item. If successful, they have purchased the item.

EQUIPMENT QUALITIES

Area: This weapon impacts everyone in a narratively appropriate area (a room, a vehicle, etc.). All individuals in the area suffer the damage roll.
Concealable: This weapon is easy to conceal on your person. When you make a test to hide it, smuggle it past a frisk, or similar, add +1d10 to the test.
Full-Auto: When you spend Momentum to make an additional attack with a full-auto weapon, you gain +1d10 to the attack roll for each consecutive attack you've made up to that point (so if you make four attacks in a row, you'd gain +3d10 to the fourth attack.)
Guided: This weapon is guided. If you've had time to scout and analyse the target location (GM's discretion), you roll 10d10 on all attacks made with this weapon against the target.
Illegal: It's illegal to carry this weapon. Being caught with it can land you in a world of pain and frustration, as well as earn you a good chuck of jail time. Especially if you're already a wanted criminal.
Reliable: This weapon won't break or run down on you. You may spend a reserve to reroll any 1s once per damage roll.
Stun: This is a stun weapon. When you harm an opponent with it, they are immediately are knocked out of the narrative until brought back in, unless they spend a reserve of at least 3 value, or 5 Momentum. However, this weapon can't kill anyone.
Thrown: This is a melee weapon that can be thrown effectively at close range.
WETnet: Any WETnet-enabled item can be upgraded or linked to your cybernetic implants, but is also vulnerable to hacking. You can add WETnet to any item (excluding melee weapons) by increasing its cost by +1.
Firewall: Any item with the Firewall keyword has protection against being hacked.

WEAPONS

Damage: How many d10s you roll when dealing damage with this weapon.
Cost: The amount you need to equal or exceed on a Wealth test to acquire this weapon.
Reload: If the lowest die result on a damage roll with this weapon is equal to or lower than this number, the weapon is out of ammo. You cannot fire it again until you take an action to reload it.
Range: How far this weapon can fire.
Qualities: Any qualities that weapon has.

Weapon	Damage	Cost	Reload	Range	Qualities
Assault Rifle	4d10	8	3	Long	Full-Auto, Illegal
Carbine	3d10	6	3	Long	Full-Auto, Illegal
Heavy Shotgun	7d10	5	5	Close	Reliable
Heavy Pistol	4d10	4	2	Close	Reliable
Light Pistol	2d10	3	1	Close	Concealable
Pistol	3d10	3	1	Close	
Shotgun	6d10	3	5	Melee	Reliable
SMG	4d10	4	4	Close	Full-Auto, Illegal
Laser Pistol	6d10	10	-	Extremely Long Range	Illegal
Laser Rifle	6d10	10	-	Extremely Long Range	Illegal
Stun Pistol	-	3	-	Close	Stun
Sniper Rifle	8d10	10	10	Extremely Long Range	Guided, Illegal
Grenades	7d10	6	10	Close	Area. Illegal
Missile Launcher	10d10	10	10	Extremely Long Range	Guided, Illegal
Railgun	6d10	10	3	Long Range	Full-Auto, Illegal, Reliable
Brass Knuckles	2d10	-	-	Melee	Concealable
Thunder Knuckles	4d10	4	1	Melee	Stun
Knife	2d10	2	-	Melee	Thrown, Concealable
Mono-knife	4d10	6	-	Melee	Thrown, Concealable

WEAPON MODS

You may add any of the following mods to your weapons for 6 Cost each. All of these upgrades add the *Illegal* keyword to the weapon (as they're not for civilian use).

- **Enhanced Targeting Array:** WETnet-enabled weapons only. This weapon can be linked to a pair of AR glasses or EYEnet implants. You gain +1d10 on all attacks made with this weapon while the mod is active.
- **Slimline:** This weapon is easy to conceal and made out of hard-to-detect materials, it gains the Concealable quality.
- **Quick Draw:** You can deploy this weapon as a surprise, gaining +1d10 to the first attack roll that you make with it in a combat.
- **Silencer:** WETnet-enabled weapons only. When someone would normally hear this weapon being fired, they instead make a test (Difficulty 6) and only detect the shot on a success. This test is ignored if they're in the same room. This feature can be toggled on and off via a Net-Box (see "Other Gear").
- **Armour Penetrating:** WETnet-enabled weapons only. This weapon negates the target's armour bonus.
- **Firewalled:** WETnet-enabled weapons only. This weapon gains the Firewall quality and one kickback of your choice.

ARMOUR

Armour adds its bonus to your RESOLUTE path rating whenever you resist damage. However, when making FAST rolls, you take a -Xd10 penalty, where X is equal to your armour bonus.

Also, note that if you're walking around in medium or heavy armour, people are going to ask questions. If you don't have the right connections, those people will include the police. Armour isn't illegal, per se, but it will probably draw attention you don't want.

Armour can be upgraded with the WETnet keyword just like weapons can, increasing its cost by +1.

Armour	Armour Bonus	Cost	Example
Light	+1	5	Light, slim ballistic vest
Medium	+2	6	Ceramic-plated overcoat
Heavy	+3	7	Full riot gear with AR-augmented response toolkit

ARMOUR MODS

If you own WETnet-enabled armour, you may add any of the following mods to it for 6 Cost each:

- **Sealed:** This armour grants immunity to attacks from gases, chemicals, and liquids. However, sealed armour contains a finite air supply (enough for about ten minutes or one long scene).
- **Fireproof:** This armour is insulated and resistant to heat and fire, granting a +1d10 bonus on any tests made in relation to fire and heat.
- **Infraproof:** This armour masks your body temperature, fooling thermal cameras and vision, granting a +1d10 bonus in any situations where thermal or heat-based vision might detect you, and negates Infravision.
- **Wingsuit:** This armour can deploy a wingsuit, allowing you to glide through the air. This requires a FAST test to successfully use. You are at no risk of falling, but you might end up in completely the wrong place or be hit by a taxi if you don't pay enough attention.
- **Firewalled:** This armour gains the Firewall quality and one kickback of your choice.

OTHER GEAR

Net-Box — Cost: 2

A small, AI-powered personal device that can be carried on your person. Generally, a Net-Box is an earpiece or wrist-worn device that uses the WETnet to sync with your personal AR rig (usually glasses or contact lenses), enabling you to look at your info on the go.

When using a Net-Box, you gain +1d10 to tests made to research a topic or consult it for information. However, it tracks everything you do and has GPS that reports to the Neo York government's central AI.

Qualities: WETnet, Firewall
Special: If you pay an additional 3 Cost, you can also get one that monitors your vitals and sends them to a monitoring station of your choice. This can be a medical facility, your own personal records, or another Net-Box that your buddy uses to monitor you while you're on a job.

If hacked, this can be manipulated to present data that's inaccurate or even allow someone to trace where the data is being uploaded to.

Repeltech Instrument — Cost: 3 per rank

The instruments are at the core of the synth-jazz musical revolution. Using a repeltech instrument adds +Xd10 to any appropriate tests, where X is equal to the instrument's rank.

Qualities: WETnet, Firewall

WETgloves — Cost: 7

Gloves or fingertip implants that allow you to manipulate AR. Useful for everyone, but especially helpful for hackers. WETgloves grant a +1d10 bonus to any tests made to manipulate AR, and increase the value of any reserves spent during hacking by 1.

Qualities: WETnet

Personal Fireaura — Cost: 5 (+2 per kickback)

A personal firewall protects your WETnet gear from hacking. Any WETnet gear on your person is protected by this firewall.

Qualities: WETnet, Firewall (applies to all WETnet gear you carry)

AR Sights Mods — Cost: 8 per upgrade

These mods can be applied to improve your AR glasses or implants.

Qualities:

- **Infravision:** You can see heat signatures.
- **Nightvision:** You can see in the dark, but sudden flashes and bright lights will disorient you.
- **WETsight:** You can see the WETnet, allowing you to see the flow of information and trace where signals are going.
- **Recorder:** You can record anything you see but cannot store data itself. You need to stream the recording via the WETnet to a storage medium of your choice.
- **Auto-Zoom:** Your eyes can zoom in on distant objects as though you were using binoculars.

OTHER EXPENDITURE

Basic day-to-day expenses doesn't need to be tracked. Assume that most of these costs are purely narrative, and Wealth tests should only be rolled for big expenses. Here's a list of goods and services PCs should have free access to:

- Vending Machines
- Food Kiosks
- Snack Shacks
- Brief Hotel Stays
- Taxis
- Shuttles
- Public WETnet Jacks
- Reboot Room
- City Monorail

CYBERNETICS

Cybernetics are high-tech implants that enhance your abilities beyond normal human limits. By 2093, the practice of implanting cybernetics is common enough to be unremarkable, and some people have implants that are purely cosmetic. All cybernetics have the WETnet quality and are therefore vulnerable to hacking. You can only acquire a particular cybernetic once, though some have additional upgrades you can purchase.

A character with the Cyborg origin can have up to 30 Cost worth of cybernetics, whereas other characters may never have more than 15.

LOW-QUALITY CYBERNETICS

You can purchase low-quality cybernetics for half-price (rounded up), but you risk buying shoddy gear. Any time you spend a yellow or red action token, and the test uses a bonus from low-quality cybernetics, the GM may **Disrupt** the implant, causing it to cease working for the rest of the scene as it goes offline.

You can spend a reserve to bring a disrupted cybernetic implant back online.

CYBORGS AND CYBERNETICS

Is a cyborg simply anyone who has implanted cybernetics? In short, no. Being a cyborg requires more than just having some casual "ease of life" or "lifestyle" implants. Cyborgs pursue enhancement through cybernetics as a passion. Naturals might get an implant or two if it will make their life a little easier, but for cyborgs implants are an essential part of their identity.

Fashionetics — Cost: 2

These are a variety of cybernetic fashion upgrades. Regardless of their appearance (be they neon-tats, LED hair, implanted holograms, or other cosmetic upgrades), Fashionetics can grant you +1d10 to applicable tests when they have an impact on those who see you. Hacking them is unlikely to harm you, but can be visually and aesthetically disruptive.

Lifehack — Cost: 3

A lifehack is an implanted device that monitors, records, and updates your vitals, sending them to a monitoring station of your choice. This can be a medical facility, your own personal records, or a Net-Box that your buddy uses to monitor you while you're on a job.

If hacked, this can be manipulated to present data that's inaccurate or even allow someone to trace where the data is being uploaded to.

EYEnet Implants — Cost: 7

Cyber-eyes that link to your WETnet gear, they serve a similar function to AR glasses, but with a much higher response time (and they're significantly less likely to fall off your face).

EYEnet implants can be upgraded with any of the AR Sights Mods on page 121, but each upgrade is 7 Cost rather than 8.

EARnet Implants — Cost: 7

Cyber-ears that grant you better access to audio performance and interpretation. They function like audio recorders and enhance your hearing, granting a +1d10 bonus to applicable tests.

Skinpouch — Cost: 5

A skinpouch is a cybernetic implant that grants you a secret compartment inside your body. This can be used as a holster for a weapon, a smuggling pouch, or a somewhere to store sensitive evidence.

Subdermal Armour — Cost: 6

Kevlar and ceramic armour implanted under your skin. Subdermal armour counts as light armour, but applies no penalty to FAST tests. This can be upgraded to medium or heavy armour by increasing the cost by 2 or 3 respectively.

Subdermal Weapon — Cost: Weapon Cost +2

A weapon implanted in your body. This can be a melee or ranged weapon. The weapon automatically gains the WETnet quality.

Cyberlimbs — Cost: 5

Cyberlimbs grant you +1 to your FAST, RESOLUTE, or VIOLENCE path rating when you acquire them. You may acquire the cyberlimbs implant twice (once for legs and once for arms).

A LIMITED LIST OF CYBERNETICS

Crescendo of Violence isn't about extensive cybernetic modification and so we've only presented a basic set. If you'd like to include more specialised and exciting implants, feel free to create and adapt your own as your campaign needs them.

GENEMODS

Less common than cybernetics, some people choose to enhance their bodies via genetic modification. Genemods and cybernetics don't tend to play nice together, so it's unusual for someone to use both, but it's not unheard of. You can only acquire a particular genemod once, though some have additional upgrades you can purchase.

A character with the Gen-G origin can have up to 30 Cost worth of genemods, whereas another characters may never have more than 15.

Some genemods have an equivalent cybernetic implant. In such cases, a character may not benefit from both simultaneously.

Adrenaline Refinement — Cost: 4

This genemod reworks the body's production of adrenaline to enhance and control its effects. A character with this genemod can spend a reserve to gain Momentum equivalent to its value (spending a 4 value reserve grants 4 Momentum).

Bioweapon — Cost: Weapon Cost +2

You have an organic weapon incorporated into your body. This must be a melee weapon.

Bone-Growth Webbing — Cost: 5

Bone is grown, thickened to create a solid ribcage, and expanded to cover vital body parts. This warps your appearance, giving you -1 to your EMPATHETIC path rating. Bone-growth webbing counts as light armour, but applies no penalty to FAST tests.

Bone Reinforcement — Cost: 3

Bones are reinforced by re-layered biomass, granting you +1 to your RESOLUTE path rating.

eLung — Cost: 4

An eLung is a regrown, enhanced, and improved breathing apparatus that allows you to hold your breath for extended periods and better resist airborne pathogens and toxins. You get +1d10 on any applicable tests.

iReVamp — Cost: 7

Your eyes are swapped out for superior lab-grown replacements that allow you to process light into energy. You can spend any amount of Momentum to gain a reserve of equivalent value (you can spend 4 Momentum to gain a value 4 Reserve).

iReVamp eyes can be upgraded with any of the AR Sights Mods on page 121, but each upgrade is 7 Cost rather than 8.

SinewSteel — Cost: 5

Your muscles are reinforced and regrown to be stronger, faster, and more durable. SinewSteel grants you +1 to FAST, RESOLUTE, or VIOLENCE when you acquire it.

LOW-QUALITY GENEMODS

Unlike cybernetics, there is no option to purchase low-quality genemods.

HACKING AND THE WETNET

The WETnet is a global wireless communication and power distribution infrastructure. Thanks to the WETnet, your electronics are always powered, always on, and always connected. The drawback (obviously) is that anything connected to the WETnet can be hacked by nefarious individuals.

Most folks don't worry about it too much. An average person's day-to-day data is already readily accessible if you put a little effort in, and not of enough value for them to spend any money on extensive measures to protect it. Plus, their money is safe because GFTs are incredibly difficult to steal without getting caught (that'd mean tangling with Logos and only a very small few are simultaneously skilled and stupid enough to do something like that).

The WETnet is an ecosystem and ecology of its own unique design. By 2093, the vast majority of electronic devices are WETnet-enabled, and almost everything can be monitored from your Dumb-Box or Net-Box.

The WETnet is operated by the UN, who have made it free at the point of use. Add to that the fact that it charges any device connected to it, and you can be sure that your connection is never at risk. You're always online, so you don't need to worry about dialling or jacking into anything; the WETnet is always there at your fingertips.

Nearly everything has an AR overlay on it, which can be managed using WETgloves or a Net-Box. It's pretty easy to get around and use most of the technology in the world around you.

HACKING

To hack a device that has the **WETnet** quality, you must take an action using a green or yellow action token and spend a reserve. You must either be within sight of the device you are attempting to hack, or succeed on a Difficulty 7 test to hack it remotely.

Only characters with the Hacker profession or talent can hack.

If the device you want to hack does not have the Firewall quality, you succeed as soon as you pass the test. You can choose one of the following hacking options:

- **Access:** You access the device, gaining the ability to peruse any information it is transmitting or storing. Each turn, the device's user can attempt to boot you by spending a reserve. You must spend a higher-value reserve to remain connected.
- **Disable:** You shut down the device. It ceases working, and the user must spend a Reserve or Momentum to bring it back online.
- **Fry:** You can fry the device, causing it to explode in an attempt to harm the user. Spend a reserve (on top of the one spent to hack) and make an Xd10 damage roll, where X is the value of that reserve. The device is also disabled (probably permanently).
- **Operate:** You take over the device and use it for its intended purpose. This can be opening a locked door without an access code, remotely starting a taxi for a quick getaway, turning on an automatic fire extinguishing system, or anything else of that nature.
- **Spike:** You damage the device's firewall, removing one kickback from it, but are then immediately kicked out of the device.

If you are still connected to a device when you next take an action, you may spend a Momentum or a Reserve to take another hacking action without having to re-access the device.

FIREWALLS

If the device that is being hacked has the **Firewall** quality, the hacked target can spend a Reserve for another chance to protect it (and them) from the hacker. If the value of the Reserve spent is equal to or higher than the hacker's, the hacker doesn't get access to the device, and must suffer the **Kickback** effect of the firewall instead.

If no kickback is listed, the basic effect is that the hacker is denied access and must attempt to hack again. The higher quality the firewall, the more kickbacks it has.

The table below has some guidelines for the GM on structuring firewalls. Keep in mind that player firewalls are more restrictive.

Firewall Quality	Number of Kickbacks	Cost
Personal Grade Firewall	0 (standard access denial)	2
Enhanced Personal Grade Firewall	1	3
Small Business Grade Firewall	2	4
Enhanced Small Business Grade Firewall	3	5
Microcorp Firewall	4	6
Enhanced Microcorp Firewall	5	7
Corporate Firewall	6	8
Enhanced Corporate Firewall	7	9
Military Grade Corporate Firewall	8	10

KICKBACKS

A firewall can have multiple instances of the same kickback, and all kickbacks trigger on any failed attempt to hack the device.

- **Blitz:** The hacker suffers a 2d10 damage roll.
- **Bomb:** The hacker suffers a 5d10 damage roll. This counts as two kickbacks.
- **Eject:** Disable one piece of the hacker's gear.
- **Erase:** Force the hacker to erase one Reserve.
- **Hunter:** This firewall will try to track you and find you. The hacker must spend a Reserve or the firewall will dispatch three guided missiles to their location. This counts as two kickbacks.
- **Nuke:** The hacker suffers a 10d10 damage roll. This counts as three kickbacks.
- **Scan:** The firewall traces your location, and a threat is dispatched (at minimum a guided missile, perhaps a unit of mooks or thugs).
- **Virus:** The hacker suffers a 1d10 damage roll. If they take harm from this roll, they lose 1 from a path rating of their choice for the remainder of the session.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

NPCs don't have the same mechanics that PCs do, with the same paths and talents. Instead, NPCs are a collection of six attributes:

- **Physical**: This character's dice pool for physical activities, such as climbing, jumping, running, swimming, and lifting heavy objects.
- **Social:** This character's dice pool for social activities, such as lying, detecting lies, persuading, dancing, and playing music.
- **Mental:** This character's dice pool for mental activities, such as investigating, researching, knowing information, and administering medicine.
- **Combat:** This character's dice pool for attacking and evading.
- **Damage:** This character's dice pool for damage rolls.
- **Harm:** How much harm this character can take before they are removed from the scene. NPCs don't suffer harm like player characters do, instead they lose one harm whenever they're hit in combat. When an NPC's harm is down to zero, they are removed from the scene.

These attributes (except harm) are expressed as Xd10 pools, telling you how many dice you should roll when the character is involved in an opposed test.

Some NPCs have special abilities, which are unique rules that modify how they are used and play. For the sample characters listed in this section, any special abilities will be mentioned in their profile.

If you want to give a bit more oomph to a major NPC such as your story's recurring villain, feel free to create them using the PC character-creation rules and run them as an extra PC in any scene they're in, only under the GM's control (potentially with their own Momentum, Reserves, and action tokens).

ENEMIES

MOOKS, GRUNTS, AND THUGS

These are the basic, common NPCs that the PCs might meet out and about in Neo York, including security forces, common street thugs, and small-time gangsters.

To give a combat a bigger sense of scale, try treating each harm value as equivalent to one member of a group, having one of them go down each time a PC inflicts harm.

NYPD Street Unit

The regular, uniformed street cops who walk a beat in Neo York. For safety, they tend to walk in pairs. Beat cops aren't terribly well-equipped or well-regarded.

NYPD STREET UNIT					
Physical	Social	Mental	Combat	Damage	Harm
2d10	2d10	2d10	3d10	2d10	2

NPCS AND TESTS

NPCs are only ever involved in opposed tests, but that doesn't mean that they don't have agency! When the spotlight swings to an NPC during a scene, use their action to tell the players what that they're attempting to do and give the PCs a chance to stop them. If a PC does, then it's an opposed test, if they don't, just have the NPC succeed.

Alternatively, if you want to add a little tension, have the NPC's first action be them starting to do a thing, then take the spotlight away. The PCs then have a chance to spend one of their own actions to interfere before the spotlight returns to the NPC and they succeed in their goal.

NYPD Sergeant

The local sergeant who co-ordinates and manages the local beat for a city block or sub-district.

NYPD SERGEANT					
Physical	Social	Mental	Combat	Damage	Harm
2d10	2d10	3d10	3d10	2d10	3

Private Security Unit

Private security guards are a dime a dozen in Neo York. Used by banks, corporations, and the elite to protect their property, the PCs can expect to encounter private security on a regular basis.

PRIVATE SECURITY UNIT					
Physical	Social	Mental	Combat	Damage	Harm
2d10	1d10	2d10	4d10	2d10	3

Private Security Team Leader

The highest-ranking on-site members of a private security operation, team leaders tend to be the main point of contact for their employers.

PRIVATE SECURITY TEAM LEADER					
Physical	Social	Mental	Combat	Damage	Harm
2d10	2d10	3d10	4d10	3d10	2

Special: Private security units in the same scene as a team leader can reroll one die each time they make a test.

Street Criminal Gang

A group of street criminals, often seen causing havoc; holding up stores, clubs, and street carts; or enforcing their boss's policies. These are the criminals the PCs are most likely to run into on the street.

STREET CRIMINAL GANG					
Physical	Social	Mental	Combat	Damage	Harm
2d10	2d10	2d10	2d10	1d10	3

Special: In territory under their control, a street criminal gang gains +1d10 to social tests. They suffer -1d10 to social tests in territory controlled by other gangs, or around law enforcement that they don't control.

Street Criminal Block Boss

The local boss of a gang or criminal organisation, block bosses oversee all the activity on their turf on behalf of the higher-ups.

STREET CRIMINAL BLOCK BOSS					
Physical	Social	Mental	Combat	Damage	Harm
2d10	2d10	3d10	3d10	2d10	2

Special: In territory under their control, a street criminal block boss gains +1d10 to social tests. They suffer -1d10 to social tests in territory controlled by other gangs, or around law enforcement that they don't control.

Any time a street criminal block boss takes harm, they can have an allied street criminal gang take the harm instead.

ELITES

Elite are NPCs that are a cut above your average mooks, thugs, and grunts. They're better trained, more threatening, and capable of handling a PC if needs be. Elite characters can easily be modified by tweaking their dice or by giving them cybernetics, genemods, or talents.

Bodyguard

A bodyguard is a professional and competent individual, usually hired to keep a VIP alive. They can be hired by anyone for the right price (usually about 7 Cost per session).

BODYGUARD					
Physical	Social	Mental	Combat	Damage	Harm
5d10	2d10	4d10	5d10	4d10	8

Special: If a character that a bodyguard has been hired to protect would suffer harm, the bodyguard may spend a Momentum to suffer that harm instead of their charge.

Bounty Hunter

Paid to find, collect, and return individuals that are of interest to their employer, a bounty hunter can show up at any time to "collect" a PC that someone has taken an interest in.

BOUNTY HUNTER					
Physical	Social	Mental	Combat	Damage	Harm
3d10	3d10	3d10	6d10	5d10	6

Special: A bounty hunter that is after a PC can show up as a complication whenever a player spends a red action token, or during any scene where the GM spends a Reserve with a value of at least 3.

If a bounty hunter removes a character they have a bounty on from the narrative, they can collect them, taking them away to their employer.

Bruiser

A bruiser is an enforcer, someone who shows up to break kneecaps, collect fees, and stamp out resistance when the regular goons can't, and to put the hurt on anyone who needs hurting. Usually the toughest guy in the room, a bruiser is not to be messed with. You can often find them as bouncers at synth-jazz clubs.

BRUISER					
Physical	Social	Mental	Combat	Damage	Harm
7d10	3d10	3d10	6d10	6d10	10

Cyborg

Individuals with extensive cybernetic implants, cyborgs are finely tuned for a single job or purpose.

CYBORG					
Physical	Social	Mental	Combat	Damage	Harm
5d10	5d10	5d10	6d10	6d10	6

Fatale

The fatale is a seductive individual who focuses on getting what they, or their employers, want using physical attraction.

FATALE					
Physical	Social	Mental	Combat	Damage	Harm
2d10	7d10	4d10	2d10	2d10	3

Special: The fatale imposes -1d10 on all social tests made in opposition to them. Additionally, anytime they attempt to harm someone who is attracted to or infatuated with them, they add +2d10 to their damage roll.

Killer

A professional assassin, the killer is the person you call when you need someone to be "disappeared".

KILLER					
Physical	Social	Mental	Combat	Damage	Harm
4d10	4d10	4d10	7d10	7d10	6

Special: A killer usually has the Killer talent (page 111) – the damage bonus is already calculated in, but they should grant the GM +1 Momentum as appropriate.

Spy

An expert at gathering information, the spy is often deployed by their superiors to infiltrate and undermine groups that are deemed dangerous or to sow discord among their enemies.

SPY					
Physical	Social	Mental	Combat	Damage	Harm
2d10	6d10	5d10	3d10	3d10	6

CONTACTS AND ALLIES

Contacts are an essential tool in the PC's toolbox. Someone you can rely on for information, aid, and support is a rare and valuable friend indeed.

Contacts are NPCs that the PCs can leverage for things like information, equipment, services, and protection. **Allies** are NPCs that will proactively work to aid the PCs.

Contacts and allies are measured by two ratings: **Resources** and **Loyalty**.

A PC can reach out to an ally or contact to gain some form of help, be it advice, material, or something else. You can only utilise each of your contacts once per session and each of your allies twice per session. You can utilise multiple allies and contacts if need be, but be warned, sometimes contacts go south and become enemies.

RESOURCES

Resources represent how much influence, wealth, and impact an ally or contact can bring to bear on your behalf. The higher the rating, the more that ally or contact can do for you.

When an ally or contact wants to accomplish something on your behalf, they roll Xd10, where X is equal to their Resources rating.

An ally or contact's Resources rating can never be higher than 5, except in exceptional situations.

LOYALTY

Loyalty represents how likely the ally or contact is to betray or undermine you. The higher their Loyalty rating, the more that ally or contact is on your side. Contacts have a Loyalty of 1–5, and allies have a Loyalty rating of 6–9. A Loyalty rating can never be higher than 9.

If someone wants to turn or compromise your ally or contact, they have to exceed their Loyalty rating on a test (perhaps multiple times, if the GM thinks it's appropriate). At times, the GM might have an ally or contact make a Loyalty test, rolling Xd10, where X is equal to their Loyalty rating.

GAINING CONTACTS

There are three main ways to gain Contacts. The first is to simply take the Contact talent. This immediately gives you a contact to work with!

You can also gain a contact through play. For example, perhaps an NPC you've met and worked with repeatedly gets upgraded to a contact by the GM. In this situation, the GM simply informs you that you have a new contact, and what their Resources and Loyalty ratings are.

Lastly, if there was an NPC you worked with this session that you're particularly fond of, you can take the Make a Friend downtime action during the Outro to cement the relationship and make them a contact.

TURNING CONTACTS INTO ALLIES

Allies are a bit harder to get. You can only gain an ally by advancing and working with a contact over the course of a campaign. The rules for spending experience points to increase a contact or ally's attributes are explained on page 72.

If a contact's Loyalty surpasses 5, they become an ally.

LOYALTY AND BETRAYAL

At the end of each session, the GM should secretly roll 1d10 and compare it to the Loyalty rating of each of the groups' allies and contacts utilised during the session. If an ally was utilised twice, the GM still only makes one Loyalty test.

If the result is higher than the current Loyalty rating of the contact or ally, they gain one **Distrust**. Once their Distrust is higher than their Loyalty, they turn on the PCs and betray, sabotage, or sell them out at the next dramatic opportunity. Distrust can only be removed via the Connect downtime action.

It's important to keep your friends happy. You need someone to watch your back.

CHARACTER SHEET

Name

CAUTIOUS

CLEVER

DRAMATIC

EMPATHETIC

FAST

RESOLUTE

SNEAKY

VIOLENT

Cred Rating

Origin

Profession

Experience

Reserves

Abilities

Talents

Weapon	Damage	Reload	Range	Qualities & Mods

Armour	Bonus	Mods

Equipment

Cybernetics

Genemods

Spend Momentum to:

Keep it Up: Immediately take an action after completing an action

Seize the Spotlight: Take the spotlight from an NPC

No You Don't: Cancel GM Momentum spend (costs 2 Momentum)

Catch A Break: Recover an action token (once per session)

Spend Reserves to:

Sure Gamble: Replace a test result before rolling

Second Wind: Recover an action token (5–8: Yellow, 9–10: Green)

Gain Momentum: Gain 1 Momentum (2 Reserves that total ≤10)

Take Cover: After combat action, take cover